

1974

# Sculpture Through Interchangeable Boxes

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*Eastern Illinois University*

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**SCULPTURE THROUGH INTERCHANGEABLE BOXES**

(TITLE)

BY

**Dale Wisniewski**

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

---

**MASTER OF ARTS IN ART**

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1974  
YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING  
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

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## INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to focus attention on the versatility of the solid geometric box and its variations as utilized by the author in creating a multitude of interchangeable sculpture from a single set of boxes. The intent of the artist, in using the box, was to create a set of boxes which could be arranged in a variety of positions to become at each time a unique and valid sculpture. For purposes of this paper the term box will be used to denote structures comprising three dimensions with opposite sides being parallel and adjacent sides at right angles. Emphasis will be placed on the variety of combinations available with each unit of boxes.

## CHAPTER I

### BOX FORM

The box in itself is not an extremely exciting form, However, when attention is given to scale, materials and presentation, the box can be transformed into a work of art of great impact.

Scale is the one critical consideration when dealing with austere simplicity. Maurice Tuchman points out that, "scale is of foremost concern to sculptors now and the extraordinary sensitivity to it reveals how limited older sculpture was in this regard. Even Constructivist sculptures. . . now look unhappily like maquettes rather than full fledged constructions. Scale in the past was too often arbitrary, or obviously influenced by restricting conditions of process."<sup>1</sup>

Materials offer additional flexibility in the process of converting otherwise mundane figures into valid art forms. Sculptors, such as Larry Bell have capitalized on the effect of chemically coated glass to create optical illusions on simple boxes. This technique serves to draw a contrast between simplicity of shape and involvement of material.. However, caution must be taken to create the proper balance of materials versus form. Material can be so overpowering as

to make form, or the external configuration, unessential. The boxes pictured in Plate I are an example of material in contrast with form. The textured surface adds an unexpected factor which immediately commands the attention of the viewer. One would undoubtedly expect the simple hard edge form to have a smooth surface, however the texture adds a warm effect. Additional aspects of this set of boxes accompany the photograph.



Plate I. Untitled. Fiberglass and particle board three boxes 2' X 2' X 2', 4' X 3' X 13", 4' X 3' X 19". One corner of each of the rectangular boxes was removed.

After choosing the appropriate scale and materials to employ, the artist must then make careful consideration of the type of presentation needed to assure maximum effect. Displaying a lone miniature in an auditorium would be as inappropriate as showing Tony Smith's "Cigarette" (Plate II) in a 30' X 30' room. In the auditorium, the miniature would be lost in the expanse of space and in the 30' X 30' room the flow of the enormous "Cigarette" sculpture would be broken because the piece could not be viewed as a whole. When choosing the environment for the display of the sculpture, the artist must visualize the sculpture and its surroundings as a total art experience. The sculpture and surroundings must function as a team, each serving as a catalyst for the other. The famous "Arch" or "Gateway to the West" as it is often referred to, adds an aesthetic quality to the skyline of St. Louis, Missouri. At the same time the view of the city of St. Louis sprawled at the base of the "Arch" gives the structure a uniqueness unsurpassed in awesome sculpture. The "Arch" would seem to epitomize an example of the importance of all the aspects previously discussed. The simple design of the "Arch" would be common and unexciting if it were not for the unusually large scale and dramatic sun-reflecting steel set against the blue sky and the city of St. Louis. All of these factors, scale, material, and presentation, play a particularly vital role in the development of the "simple form."

PLATE II



Tony Smith. "Cigarette," model: 1961. Wood mock-up to be made in steel: 1967, wood mock-up: 15'X26'X18'.

## CHAPTER II

### CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS' USE OF THE BOX

Various contemporary sculptors have used the box to create minimal forms. Ronald Bladen, Larry Bell, Lyman Kipp, Donald Judd, Tony Smith, Robert Stevenson, Anne Truitt, Lloyd Hamrol, John McCracken and John Mason are all artists who have, upon occasion, incorporated the box in sculptural design. The following will be a summary of each artist's conception of the box.

Perhaps most notable for his use of the box, is Donald Judd. Judd's use of the box ranges from a single rectangular form as in his 20' X 34' X 48" piece in plexiglass and metal (Plate III), to repetition of a single box design to create such striking works as those displayed in the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York City. In 1973 Judd created an untitled sculpture which consisted of seven 6'5" high boxes installed four inches apart on the wall of the Leo Castelli Gallery (Plate IV). The technique of repetition, for which Judd is noted, can make a simple form more meaningful. In certain of his smaller works, Judd relies on material to enhance the pure form which is the theme of all of his sculptures. Judd's larger



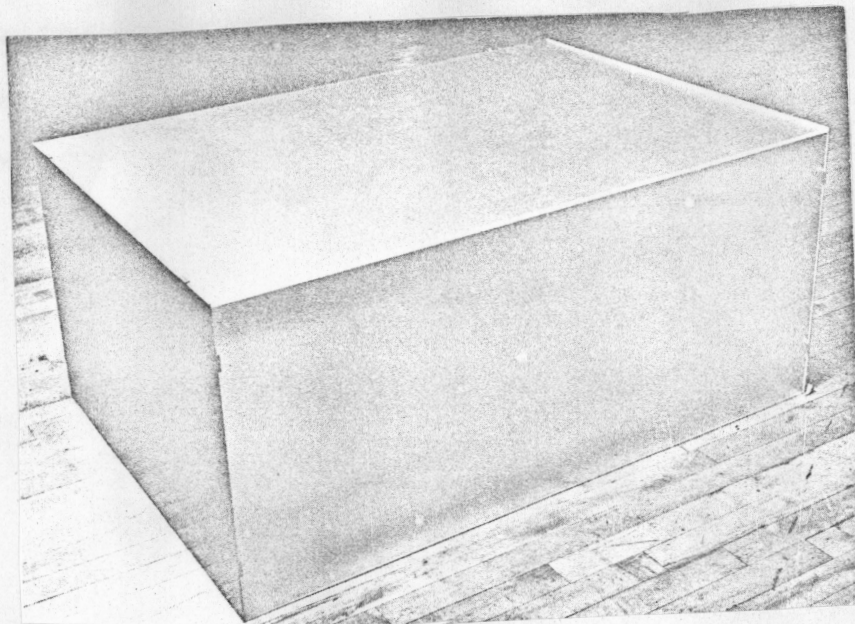


Plate III. Donald Judd, Untitled (1964), 20" X 34" X 48", plexiglass and metal. Locksley Shea Gallery.

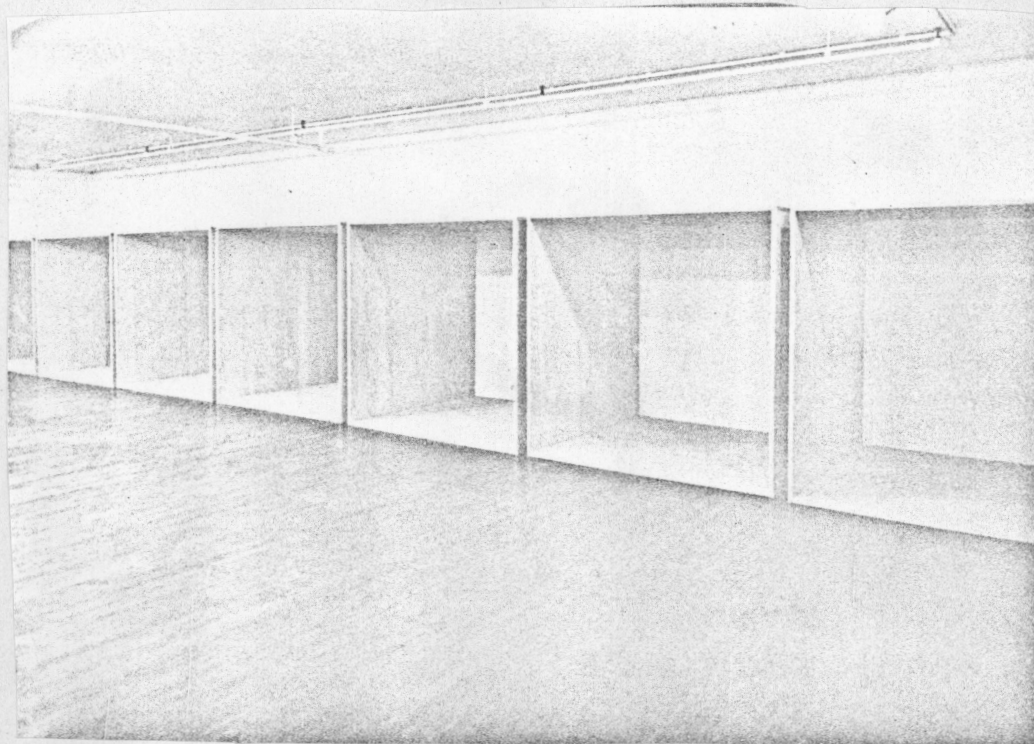


Plate IV. Donald Judd, Untitled (1973), 7 boxes, each 6'5" installed 4" apart plywood. Leo Castelli Gallery.

pieces appear more dependant on scale and less on the type of material used. An example of this is his untitled sculpture of 1973 which emphasizes five boxes, each 6' X 6' X 101" plywood on a diagonal. (Plate V)

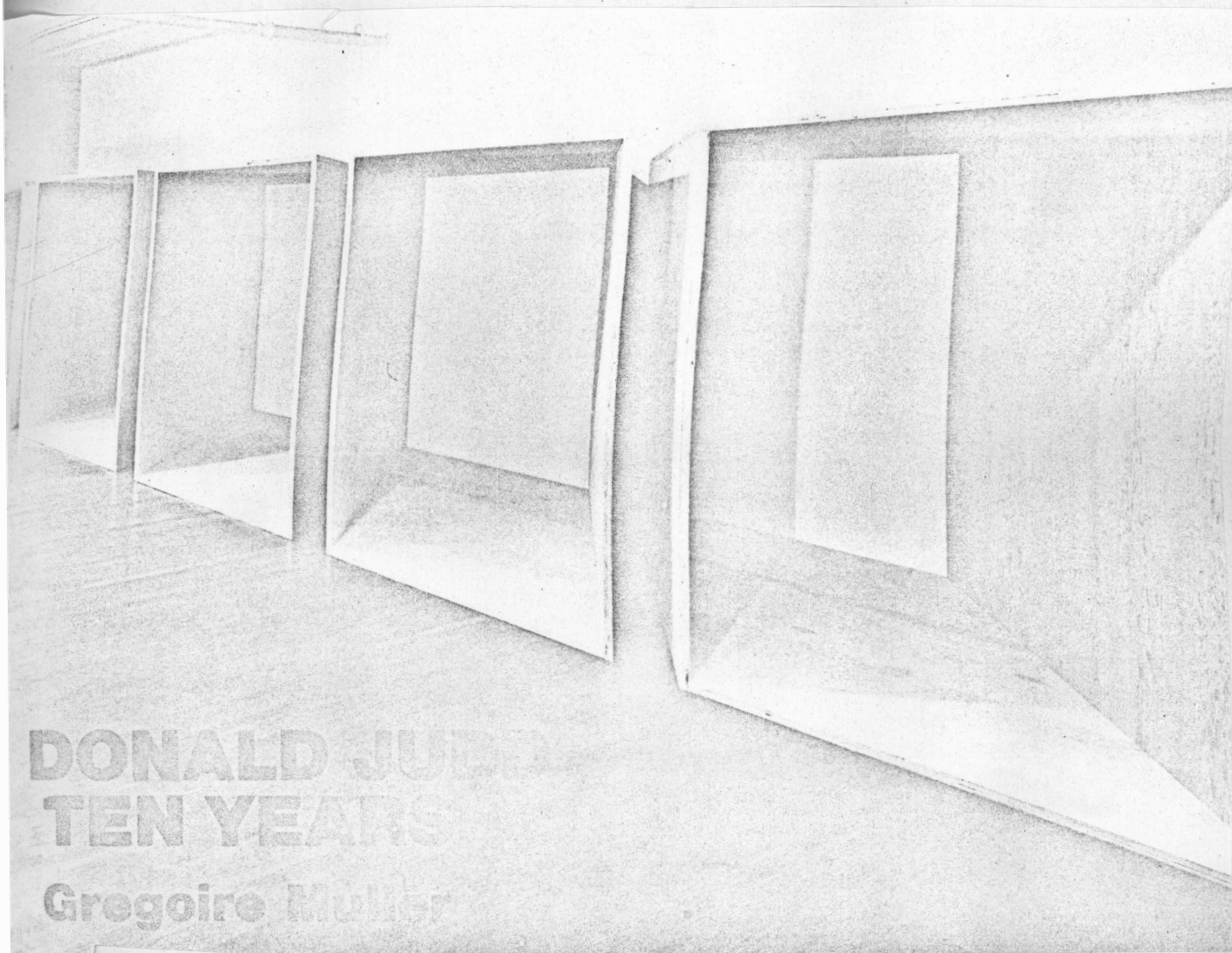
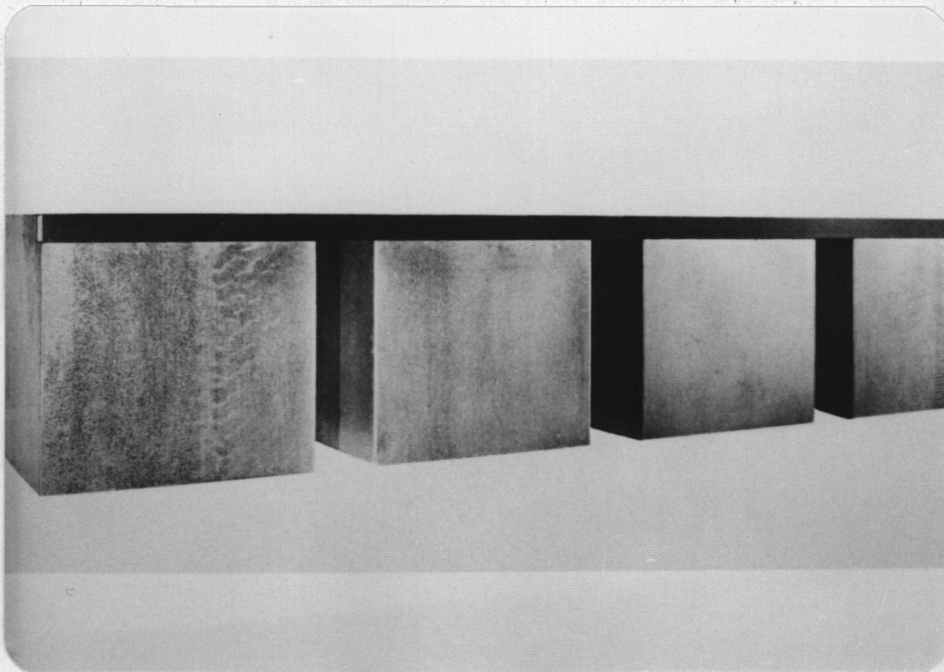


Plate V. Donald Judd, Untitled (1973), 5 boxes, each 6' X 6' X 101" on diagonal, plywood. Leo Castelli Gallery.

Had these materials been constructed, for instance, on a much smaller scale, the design might have been overpowered by the material. However, as it is, the scale and design were the only concern of the artist and the effect is a specific visual experience. When placed in a different perspective and viewed out of character, a simple form is recreated into a new statement of perception, rearranging everything in ones imagery concerning the function of the form. If however, the object were to be brought back to it's original state, the effect would be minimal and predictable. As Judd states it, "An object that refers to nothing outside of itself may initially be 'predicated' as a collection of observed facts."<sup>2</sup> However as reflected by R. Louw, "Judd's



Donald Judd. "Untitled." 1966. Galvanized iron and painted aluminum, 40"x190"x40".



objects may be considered in that they are what all objects would ideally become if experienced at that specific state of mind."<sup>3</sup> The color applied to each. Kipp also attempts to promote Lyman Kipp's approach to the use of the box is in a constructivist manner. He utilizes solid geometric boxes in their purest form without altering their shape. Most of his constructions comprise solid boxes of differing dimensions attached on the surface to form composite sculptures. To allow the boxes to remain separate and yet appear as one, Kipp imparts complimentary colors to each individual box. He has employed this technique in his construction entitled, "Muscoot" (Plate VI) where the boxes used were long and rectangular in design. In the case of the "Muscoot" sculpture,

Plate VI. Lyman Kipp,  
"Muscoot. 1967. Painted  
steel, 14'X6'X4'.

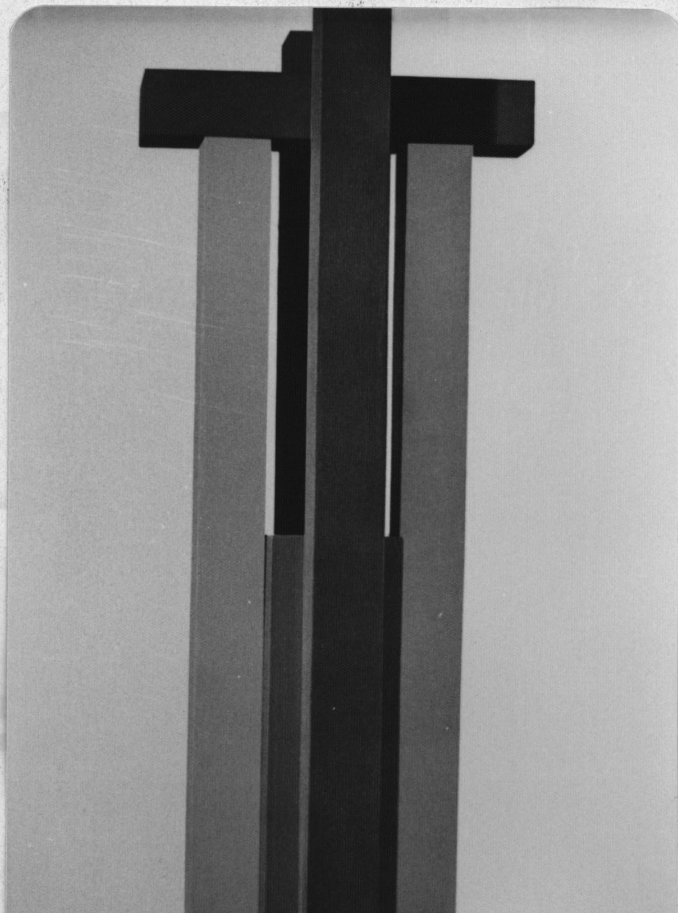


Plate VII. Lyman Kipp:  
paint, elements rearranged

each box alone would be unimportant, however as a part of a whole, they become vital and remain individualized by means of the color applied to each. Kipp also attempts to promote audience participation as he has done in a piece entitled, "Tripoli" (Plate VII) which was the result of a series of studies using closed masses as the terrain for action as well as open interior spaces as a means of encouraging active participation in the physical arrangement of the sculpture. This sculpture was created for Corcoran Galleries' School of Art, National Playground Sculpture competition.<sup>4</sup> Audience participation is also an important

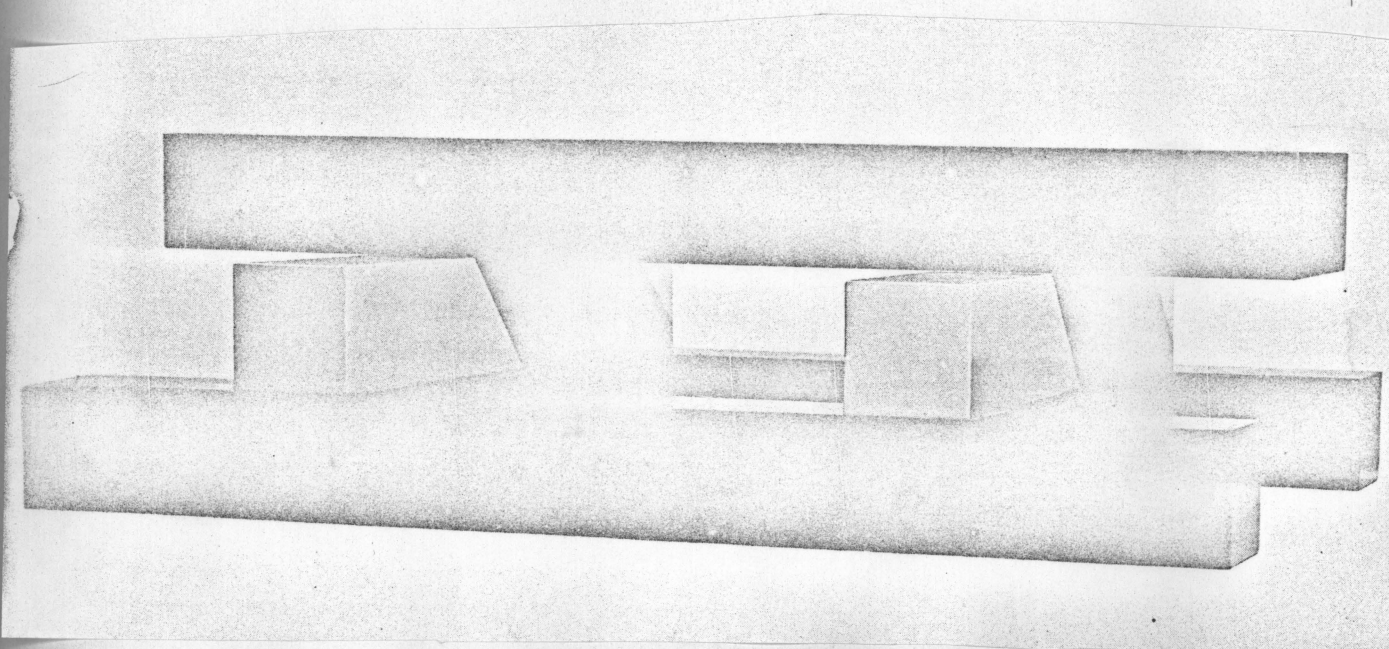


Plate VII. Lyman Kipp: "Tripoli", welded steel with epoxy paint, elements rearrangeable, 13'4" maximum planned length.

factor in the work done by the author and will be discussed in a later section of this paper.

Scale is of prime importance in the work of Ronald Bladen. He has expressed the importance of scale when he stated, "In small pieces scale is a by product, in a large piece it is the intent."<sup>5</sup> The philosophy that scale can be an end in itself, as well as the means for attaining an end, has been the theme of Bladen's sculpture. The 1966 Whitney Award Sculpture is an example of the importance of scale. (Plate IIX). The white sculptural box that composes the

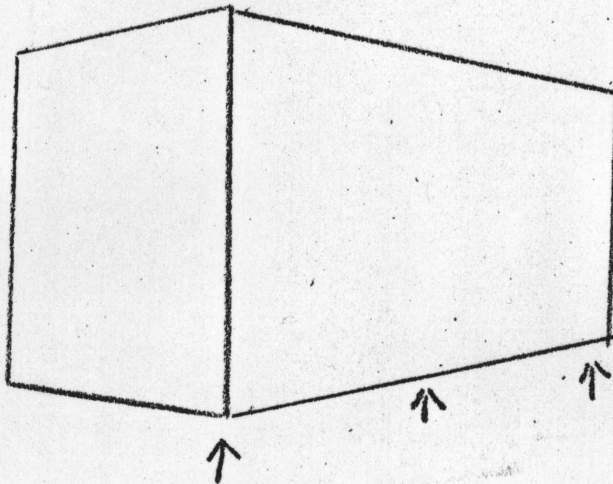


Plate IIX. Ronald Bladen. "Untitled Sculpture," 1966. 16' long. Deals with the illusion of a box resting on one edge.

sculpture is 16 feet long and gives the illusion of a tremendous box resting on one edge. A box of a smaller magnitude would be less spectacular, and consequently, the scale of this particular piece is extremely relevant. Bladen again emphasized the importance of scale in his untitled, 1965, 9' X 4' X 10' X 121" repetition of three identical boxes aligned in parallel fashion to create an orderly distorted image. (Plate IX).

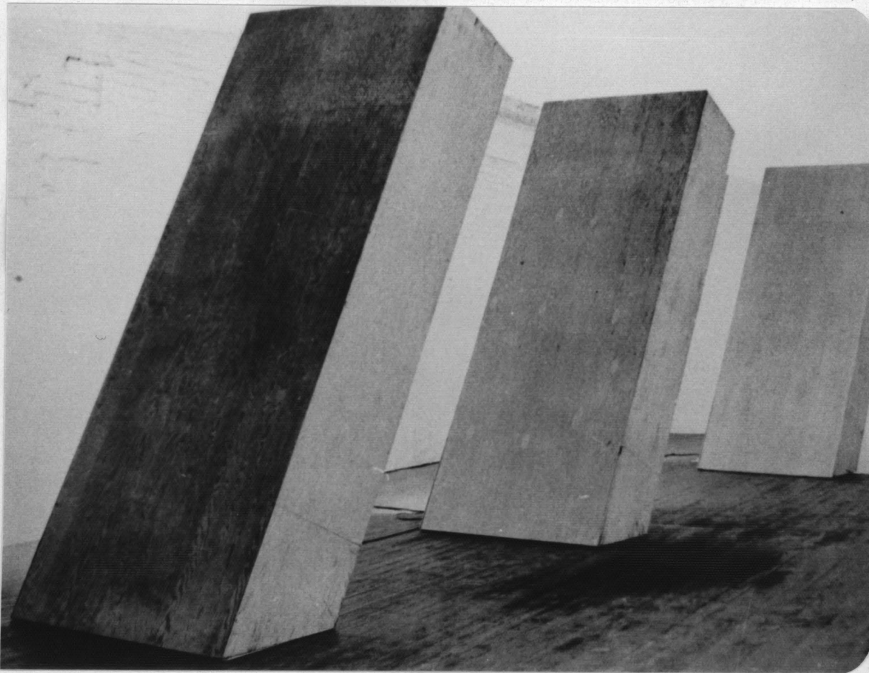


Plate IX. Ronald Bladen. "Untitled." 1965. Painted wood and aluminum, three units each, 9'X4'X10'X21".



By working in such a large scale, the artist has the advantage of immediate attention being drawn to the design he creates. On such a large scale, clean, bold lines are desirable over intricate cluttered patterns which could become grotesque when produced in large scale. Bladen states this idea in the following manner: "A single image gives you the opportunity of packing all the power into a single statement."<sup>6</sup>

Tony Smith's works have the unique quality of geometric sculpture with organic overtones. Smith's sculptures make use of irregular geometric shapes co-assembled to give the appearance of animation. "Willy" which was done in 1962, has the effect of a sculpture done with organic intensions although no curved lines are used in it's construction. (Plate X) The



Plate X. Tony Smith. "Willy." 1962. Wood mock-up to be made in steel; 1967, wood mock-up: 7'8" X12' X18'.



sculpture Smith has entitled "Cigarette", again exemplifies movement through hard edged lines. (Plate II) The contemporary steel structure which is 15' X 26' X 18' succeeds in appearing to be growing from the ground on which it is placed. Tony Smith is another artist who utilizes the solid box shape to great advantage. A sculpture done in 1967 entitled, "Die II", is a simple 6' X 6' X 6' box of steel which, due to it's scale and presentation, is effective. (Plate XI). To detract from the bluntness of the cube, "Die II", is elevated a few inches

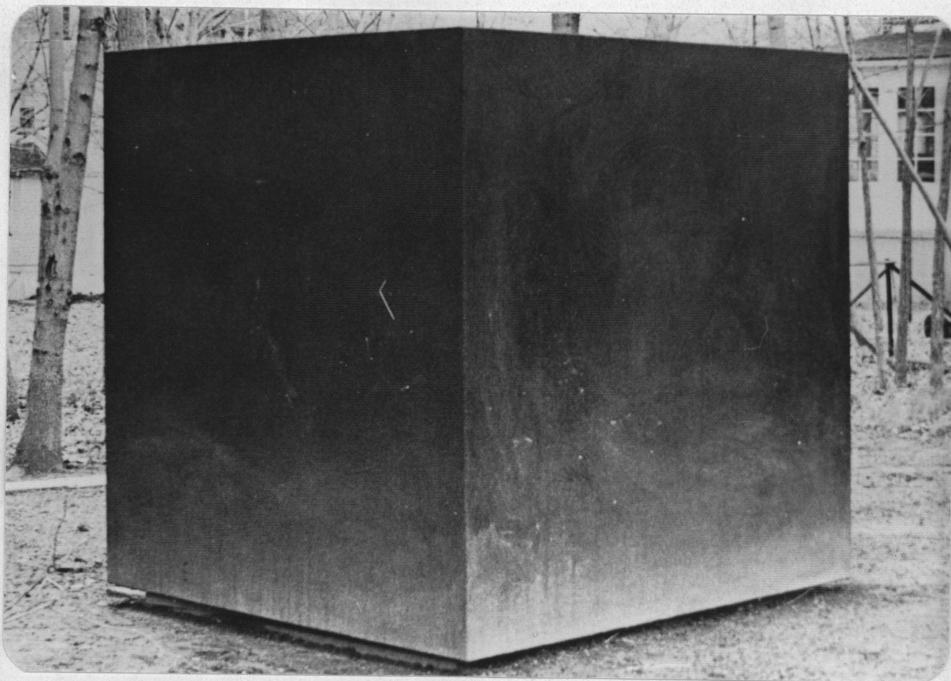


Plate XI. Tony Smith. "Die II". 1967. Steel, 6' X 6'.

from the ground to add a quality of weightlessness. This seemingly insignificant mode of presentation is ironically of as much importance as any aspect of the sculpture's design.

Larry Bell is a sculptor who uses the box as a box relying essentially on the material employed to retrieve the sculpture from the realm of the ordinary. Bell's use of rare optically coated glass to create ethereal effects is given sovereignty over the physical design. (Plate XII)

Plate XII. Larry Bell.  
"Untitled." 1967.  
Coated glass and ro-  
dium plated brass,  
15" X15" X15".

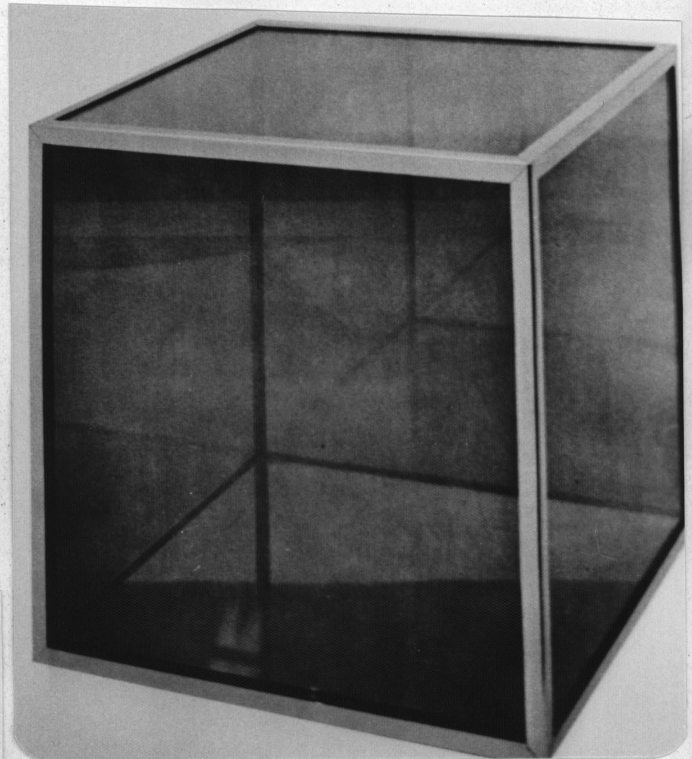
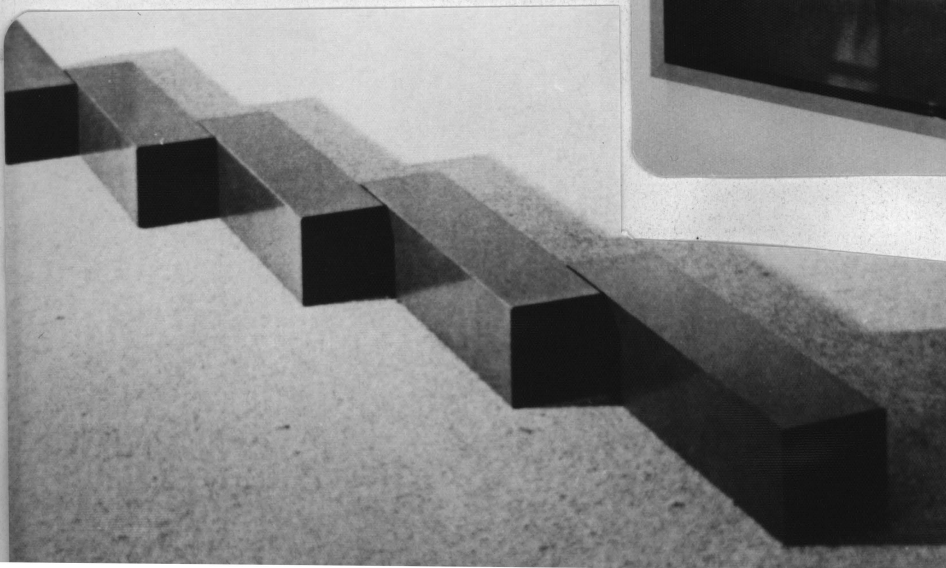
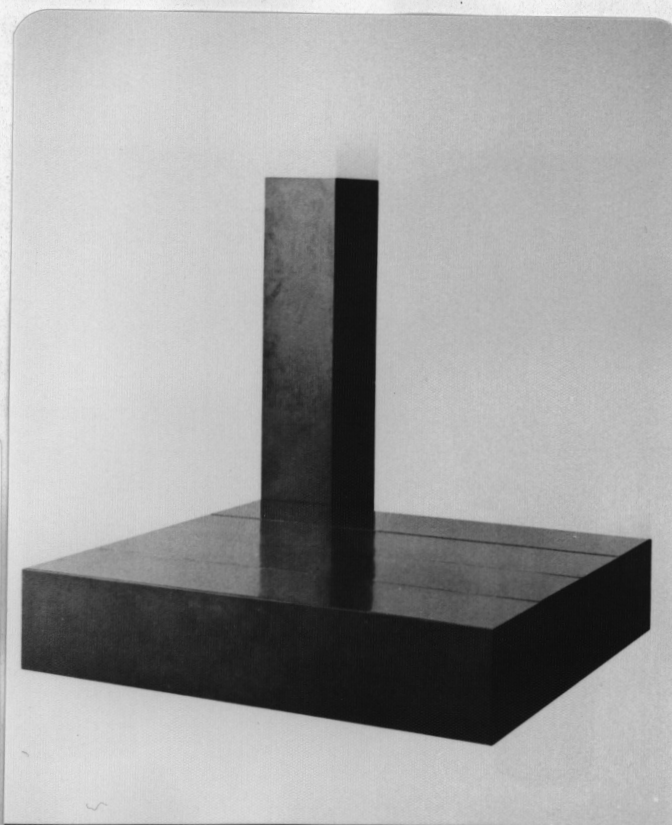
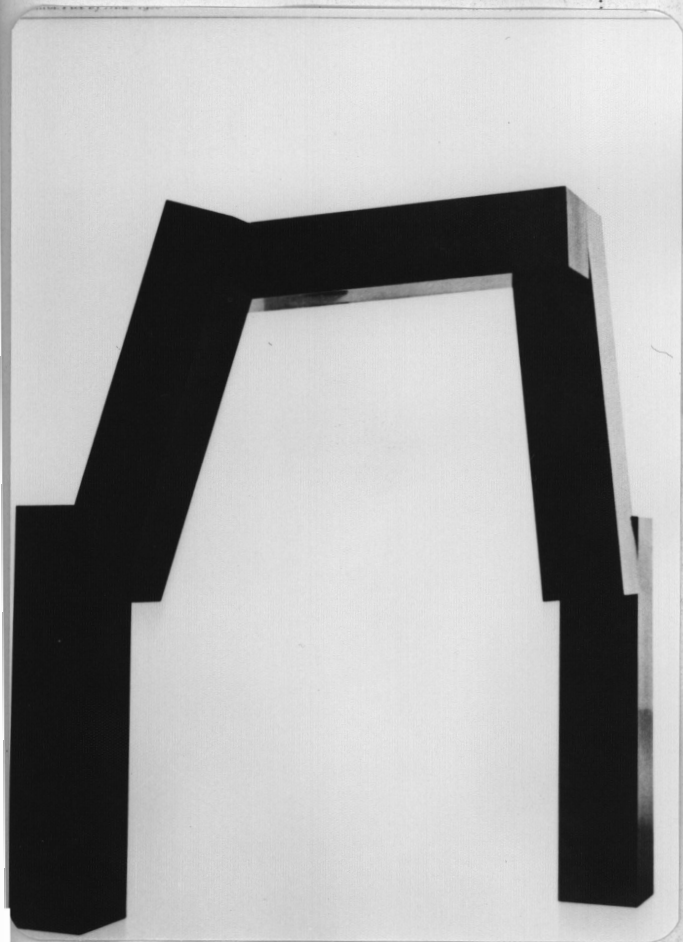


Plate XIII. Lloyd Hamrol.  
"Five By Nine". 1966.



Lloyd Hamrol's use of the box is unique in the sense that although each sculpture is constructed as one chain of connected boxes, they are so connected as to be very manipulative. The sculpture entitled "Five by Nine" includes five rectangular boxes joined end by end in a 'domino' fashion. (Plates XIII, XIV, XV) There design was so created as to allow for rearranging the formation of the boxes without disconnecting each.



Plates XIV, XV. Lloyd  
Hamrol. "Five by Nine."  
1966.



A box can be the theme of a structure without having the appearance of a solid geometric figure. A sculptor by the name of Sol Lewitt makes use of the box in an "untitled" construction he did in 1966. (Plate XVI) Lewitt developed this 50" X 50" X 50" cube from aluminum strips arranged in such a fashion as to create a mathematically perfect cube from what appears to be smaller cubes, all of equal size.

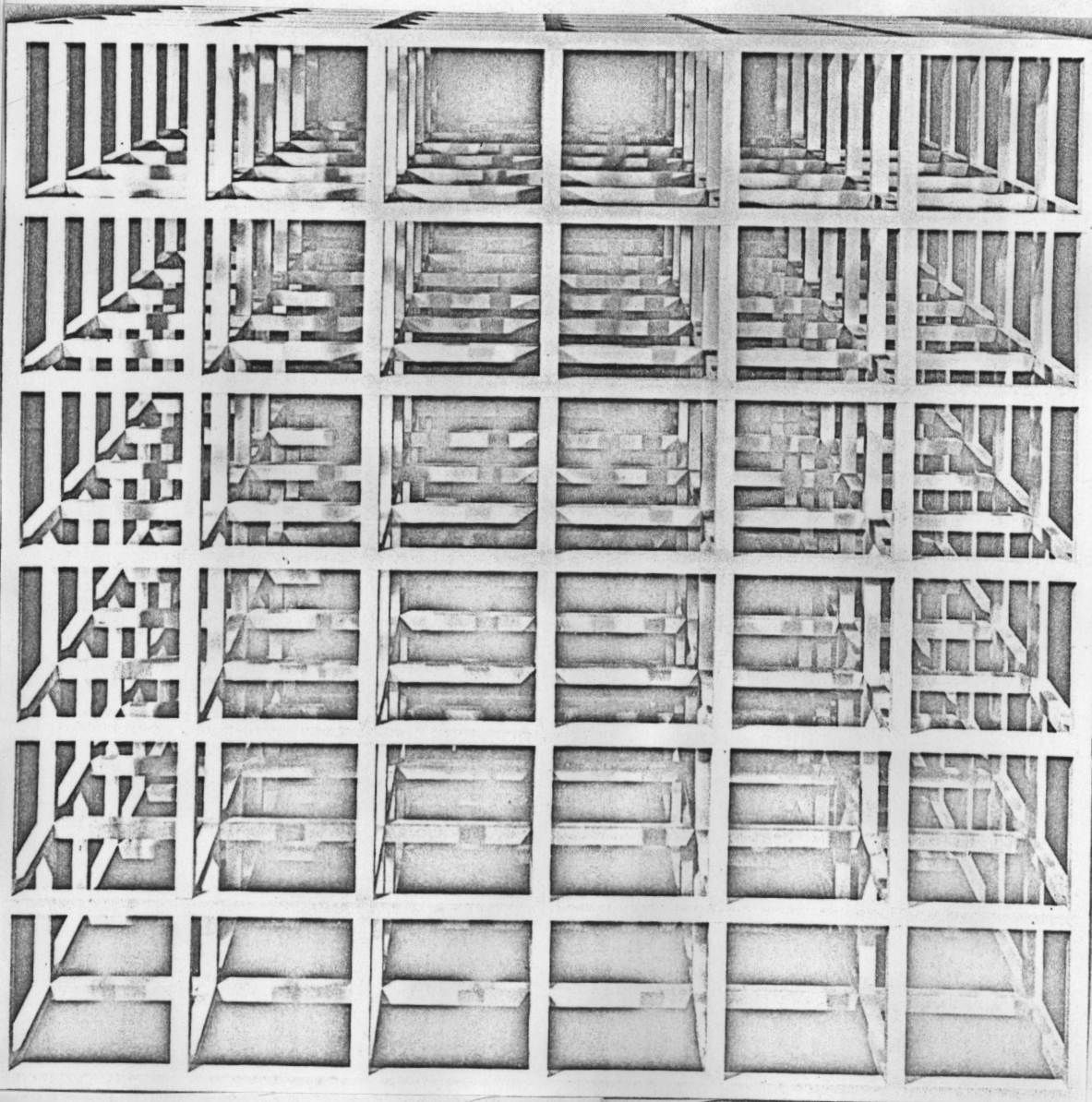


Plate XVI. Sol LeWitt. "Untitled." 1966. Enamel on aluminum, 50" X 50" X 50".

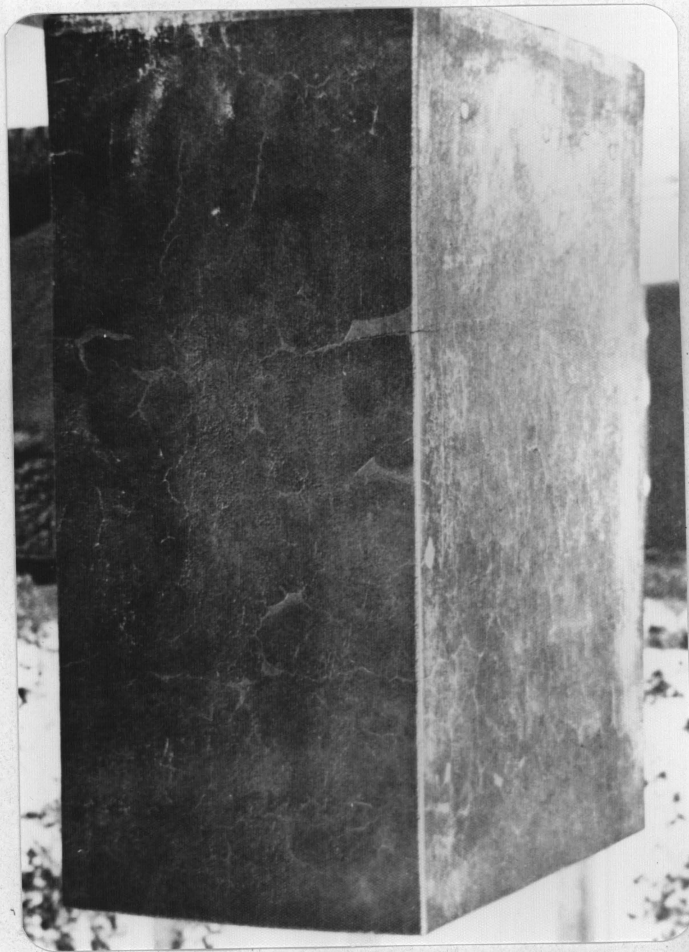
Simplicity is often overlooked for extravagant forms. However, John McCracken has designed a sculpture which is merely a 15' X 27" X 20" blue fiberglass box, and it's purity is very refreshing. (Plate XVII) The presentation of this modest design is of utmost importance. The atmosphere of open space and contemporary block design buildings, which encompass McCracken's "untitled" blue fiberglass structure, emphasize it's modern smoothness and quiet erectness.

Plate XVII. John McCracken.  
"Untitled." 1967. Fiber-  
glass, 15' X27"X20".



"Cube Form", a 60" modern sculpture in clay, is John Mason's expression of simple design coupled with inviting texture. (Plate XVIII) In this use of the box, for asthetic purposes, the massive solidness of the form is complimented by the rough crudeness of the texture applied. From this, one may suggest Mason has relied on material to illuminate the piece.

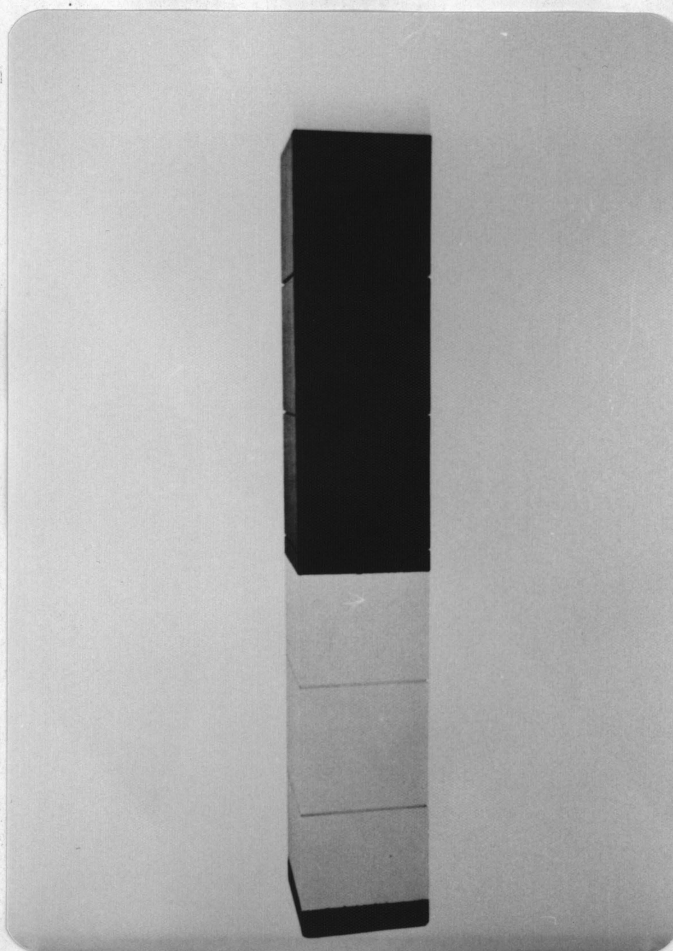
Plate XVIII. John Mason.  
"Cube Form." 1966  
Clay, H. 60".





"Shrove", is the title Anne Truitt gives her 1962 painted wood sculpture which she has designed to simulate six cubes stacked in a 'Totem pole' fashion. (Plate XIX) From a  $60\frac{1}{2}$ " X 10" X 10" block of wood, Truitt carved horizontal grooves spaced evenly apart to create the impression of separate cubes. To break the monotonous rhythm thus encouraged, the structure was painted in two tones and thus visually divided in half.

Plate XIX. Anne Truitt.  
"Shrove." 1962. Painted  
wood,  $60\frac{1}{2}$ " X 10" X 10".



In the sculptural domain, the box is a very versatile and widely used structure as is evidenced by it's adaptation to the needs of the previously discussed artists.

The basic shape of the box lends itself well to innovation and redirection. The easily constructed form allows for use of a wide range of materials and makes unlimited sizes feasible. Being so versatile and adaptive, the box leaves the artist free to explore his own adeptness in combining proper materials, scale and presentation.



## CHAPTER IPI

### THE INTERCHANGEABLE BOX

The intent of the artist, in using the box, was to create a set of boxes which could be arranged in a variety of positions to become at each time a unique and valid sculpture. This was achieved through the construction of inter-locking boxes. The boxes were designed to utilize negative space at every change. To accomplish this the artist must exercise caution in calculating and measuring the exact area intended to serve as the point of intersection. The planning of each set of boxes made use of cardboard models designed and constructed to be reproduced on a larger scale. Scale was of major consideration when developing each set of interchangeable boxes. The artist chose to use large scale to give a grandure and significance to each construction as a whole. Materials comprising each sculptural set were of less importance and the artists choice in each case will be discussed with a thorough narration of each set, accompanied by a photograph.

In developing the boxes, large scale was utilized to enhance the simplicity of form. To illustrate this concept, Plates XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV, XXV, and XXVI demonstrate

large scale coupled with simple form to create an interchangeable sculpture of the most basic design. It may be observed that at all times the section which has been removed from the solid box forms a crevice into which many different sides of the other boxes may fit. This interlocking capacity was of major concern to the artist and centered around precise calculation. Difficulty was encountered in working to achieve an exact opening which would accomodate a variety of good working forms.

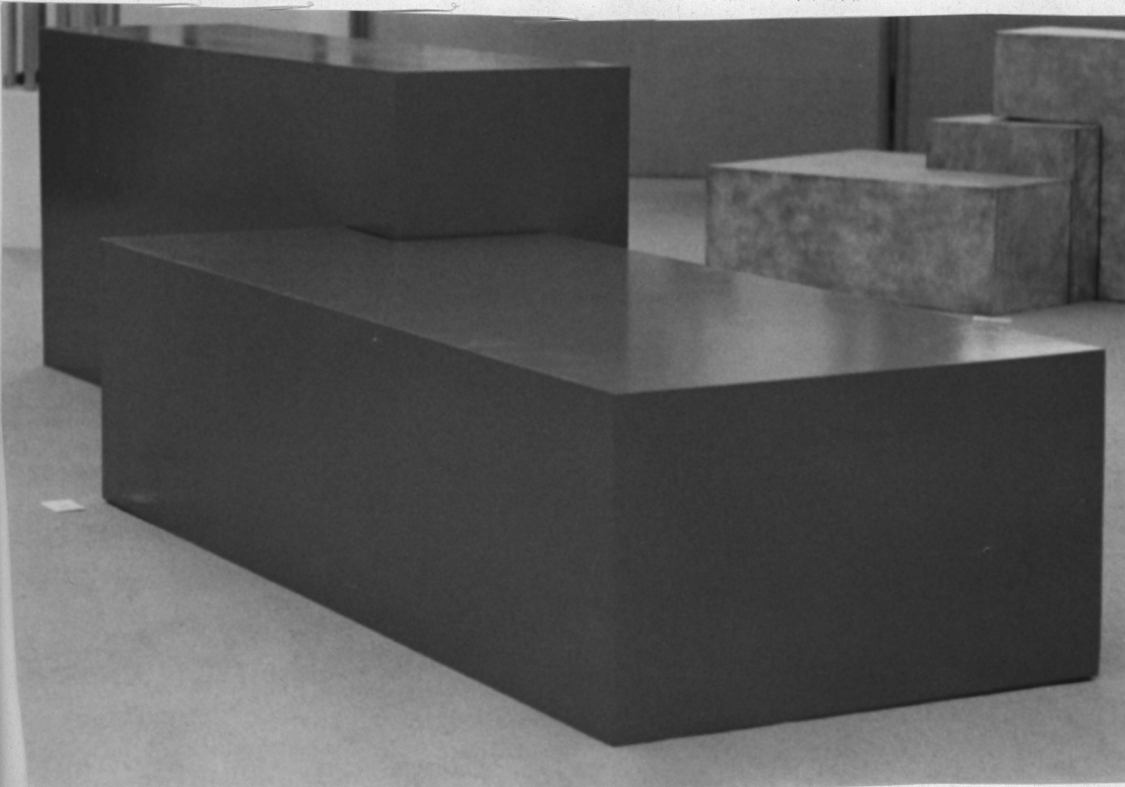


Plate XX. Untitled, particle board and enamel, 2 boxes, each 8' X 3½' X 2'.

PLATE XXI

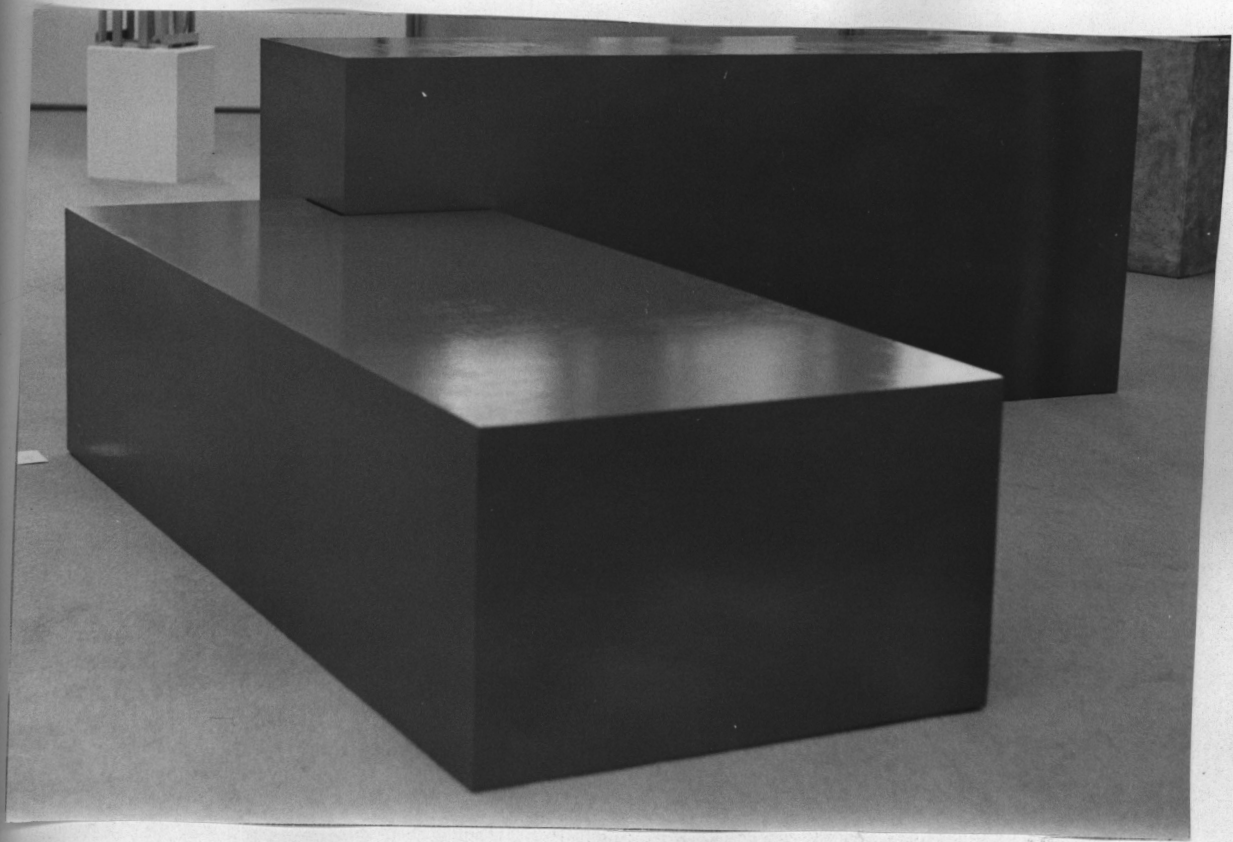


PLATE XXII



PLATE XXIII

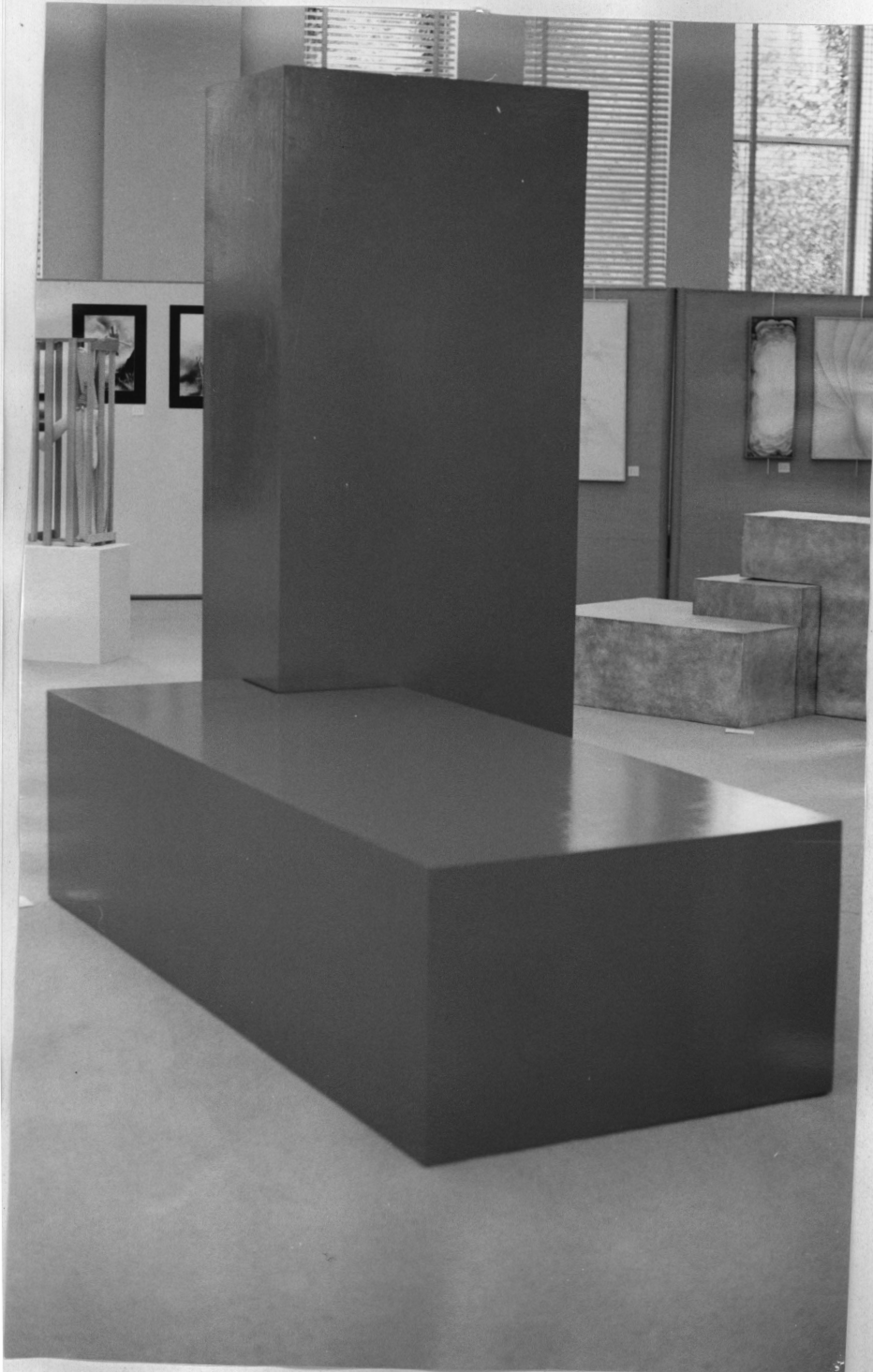




PLATE XXIV

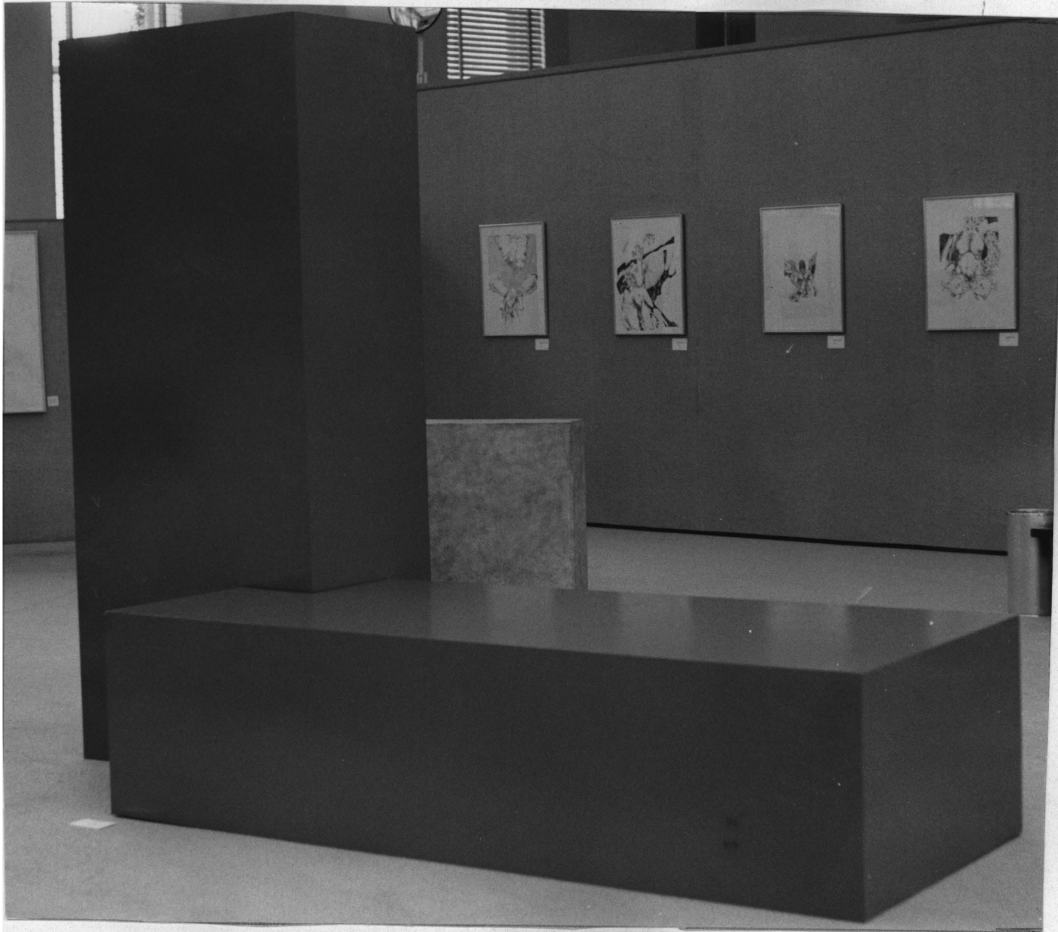


PLATE XXV



PLATE XXVI





The boxes in Plates I, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII, XXXIV, ~~XXXV~~, and XXXVI have the special quality of being the most versatile due to the irregular scale of each component box. The irregular scale gives the illusion of complexity thus smaller scale was quite well suited to this group. In addition to the potential offered due to the variety of sizes, each box was given an element of attraction by using textured fiberglass over particle board to enhance the interest in form.

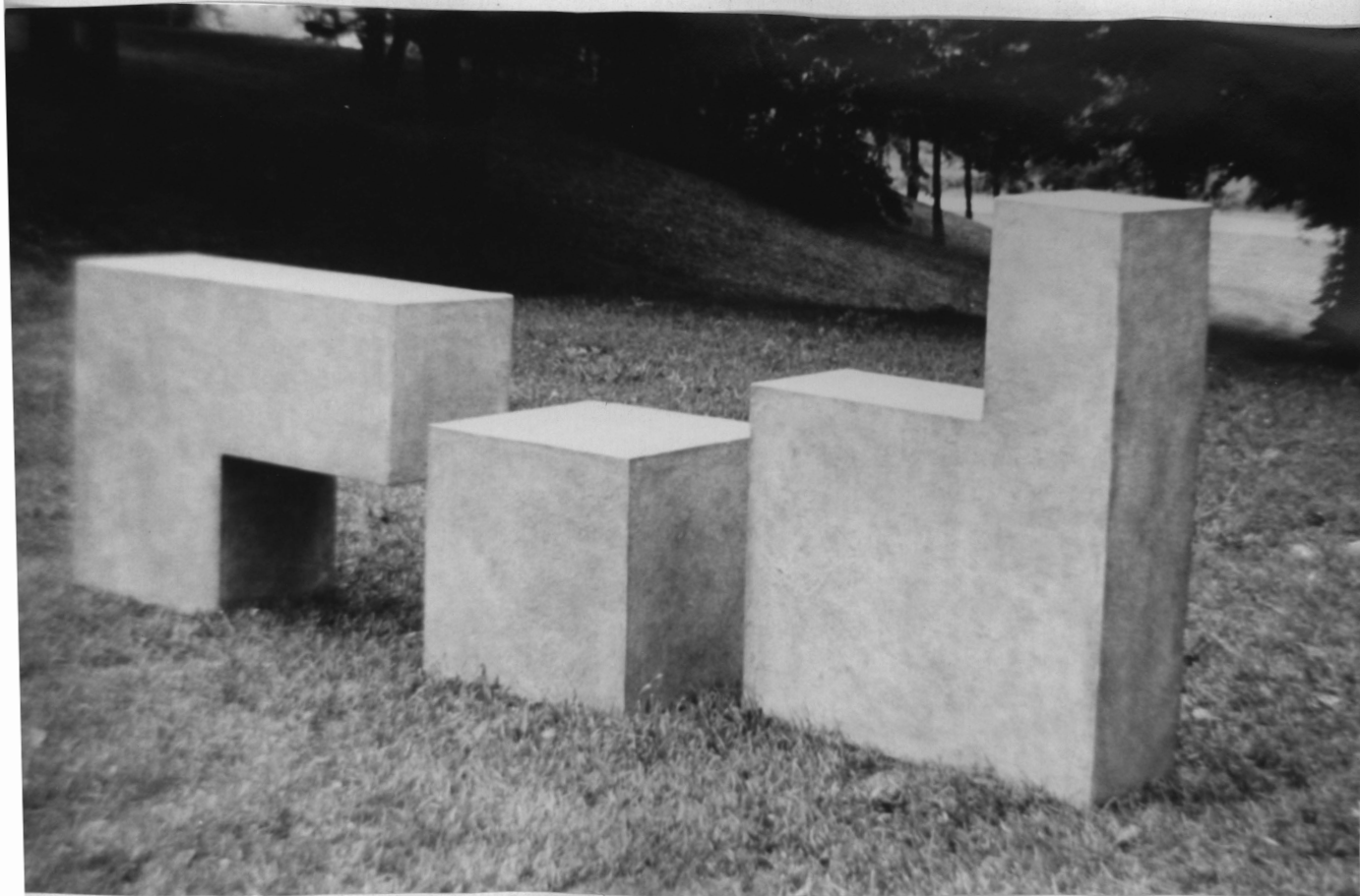


Plate XXVII. Fiberglass, particle board, and green enamel paint, 3 boxes 2' X 2' X 2', 4' X 3' X 13", 4' X 3' X 19".

PLATE XXVIII

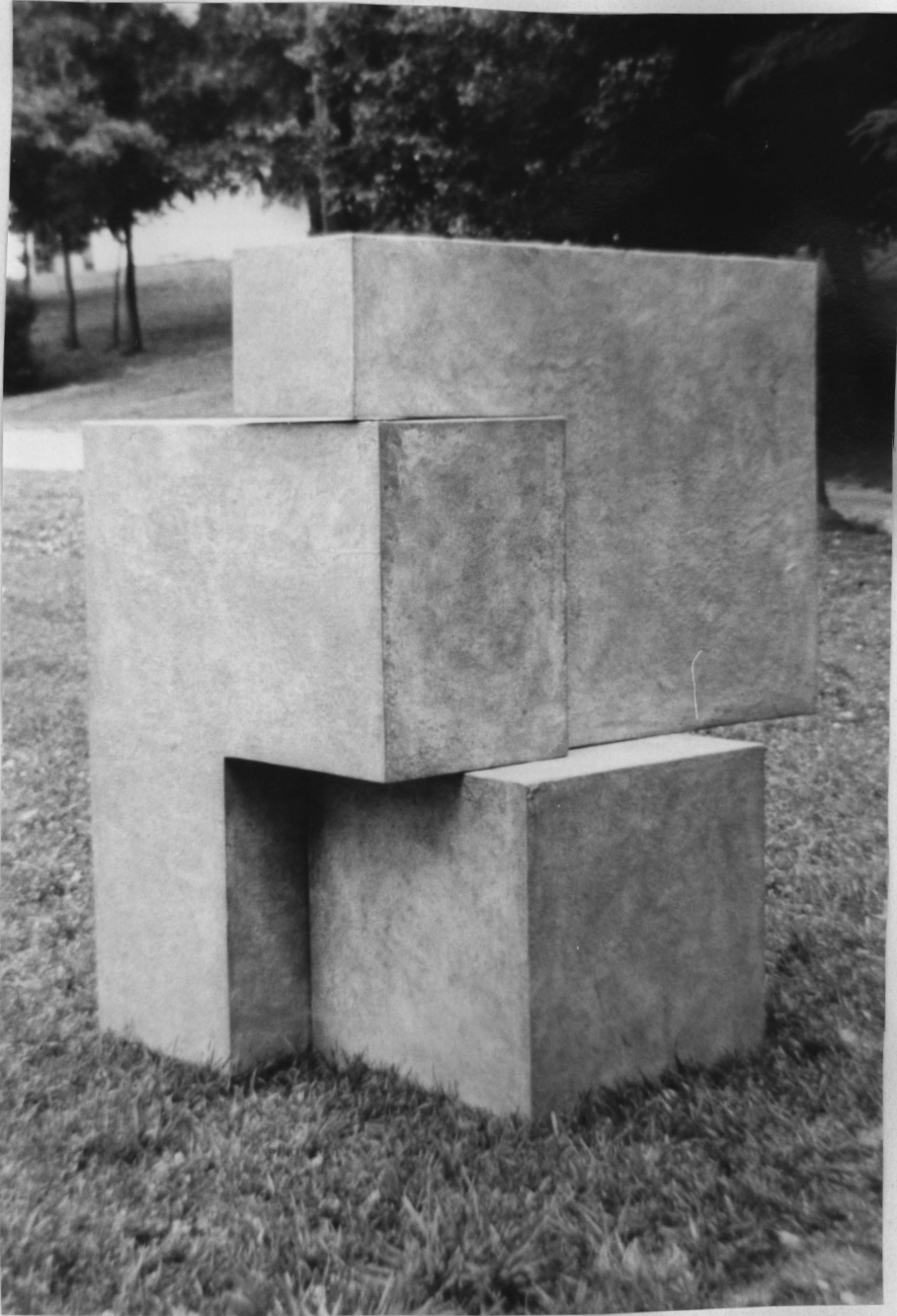


PLATE XXIX

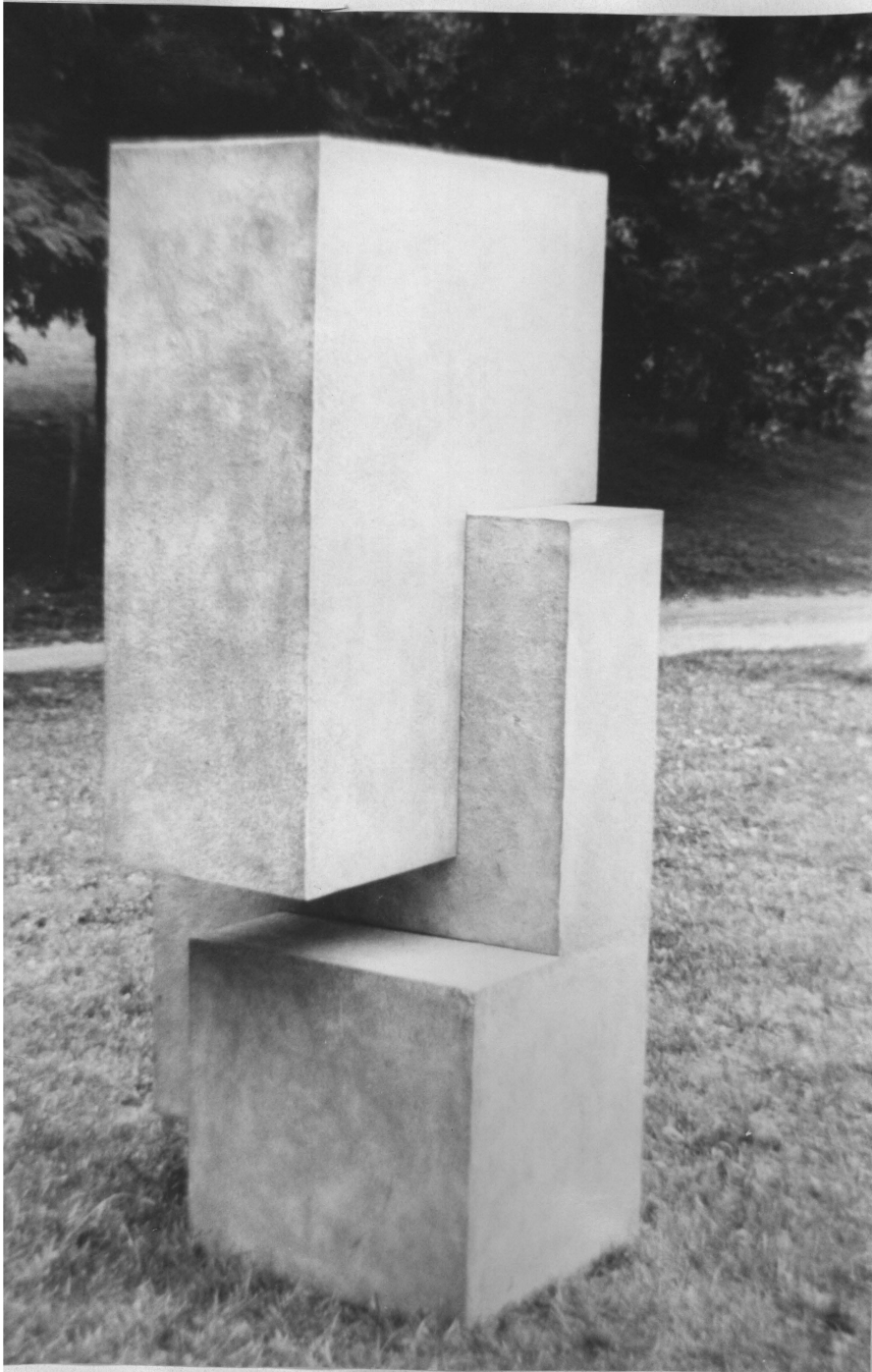


PLATE XXX

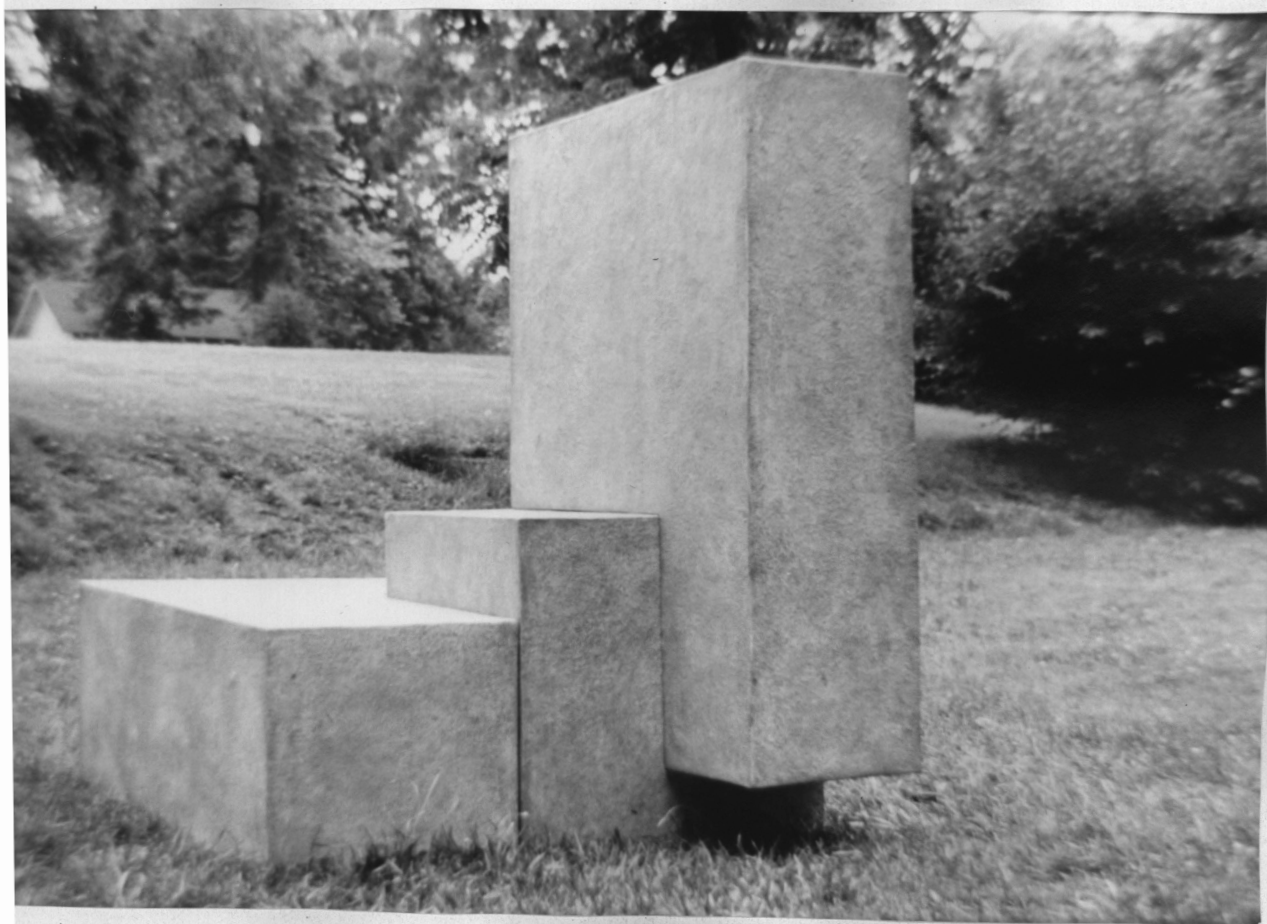


PLATE XXXI

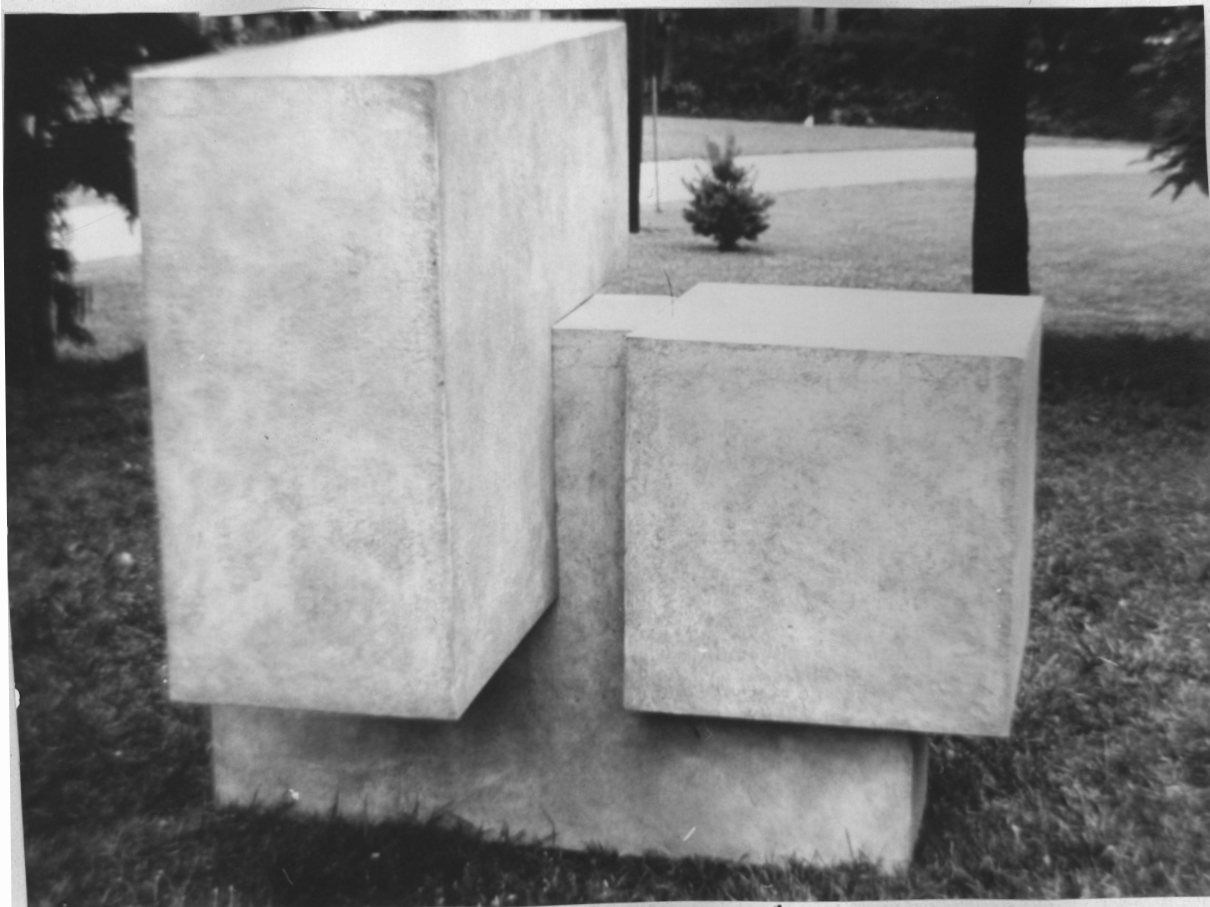




PLATE XXXII

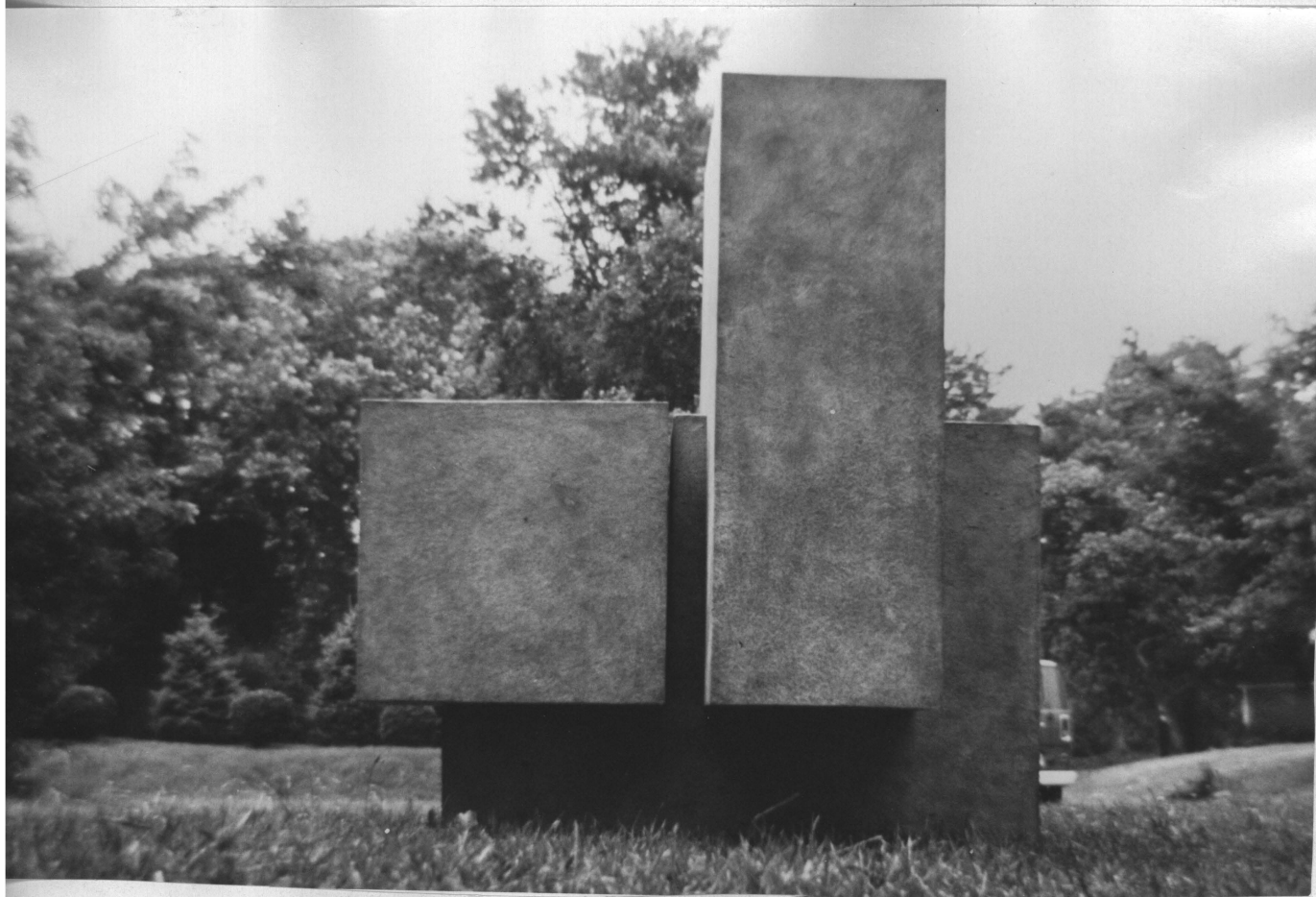


PLATE XXXIII



PLATE XXXIV

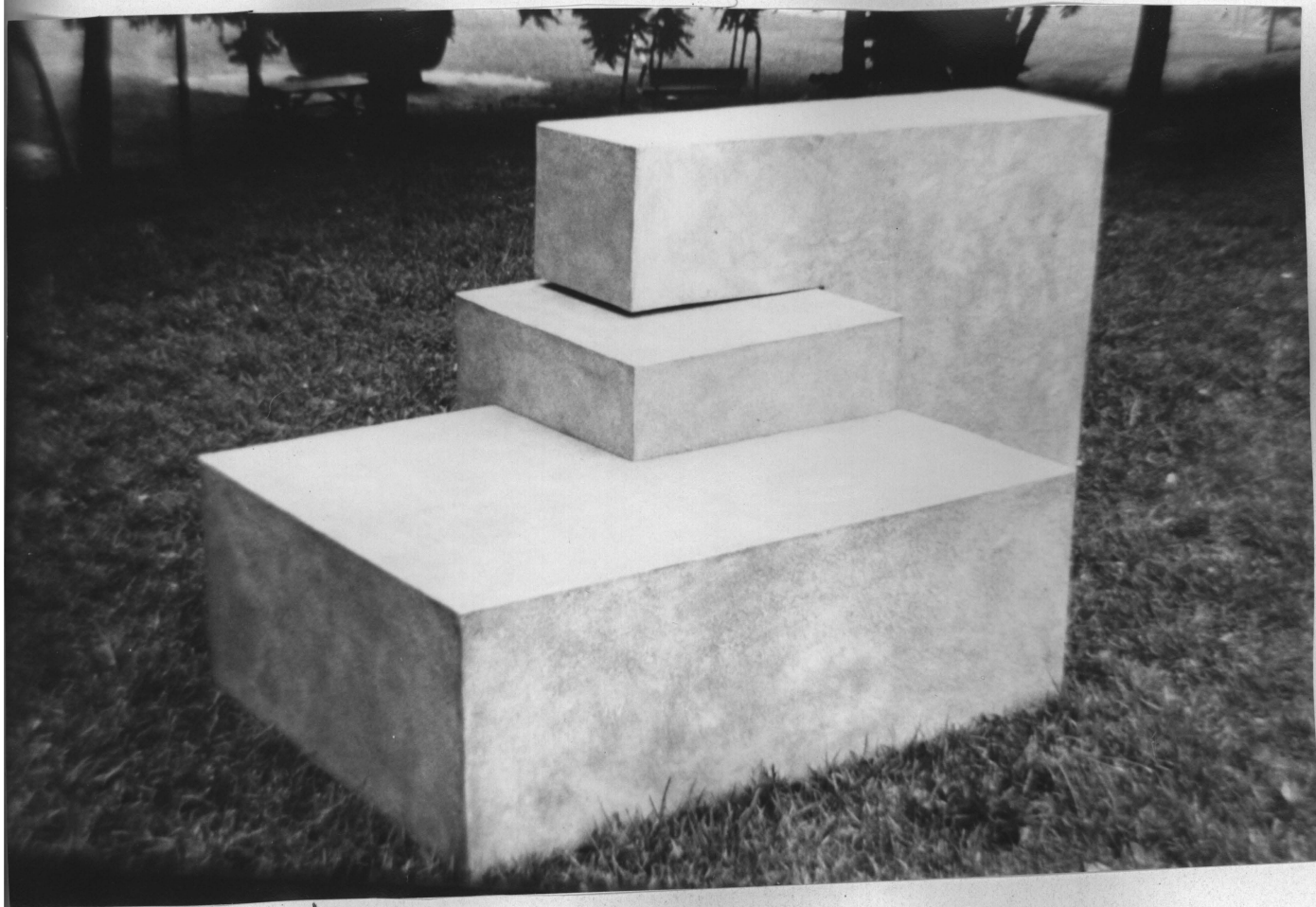




PLATE XXXV

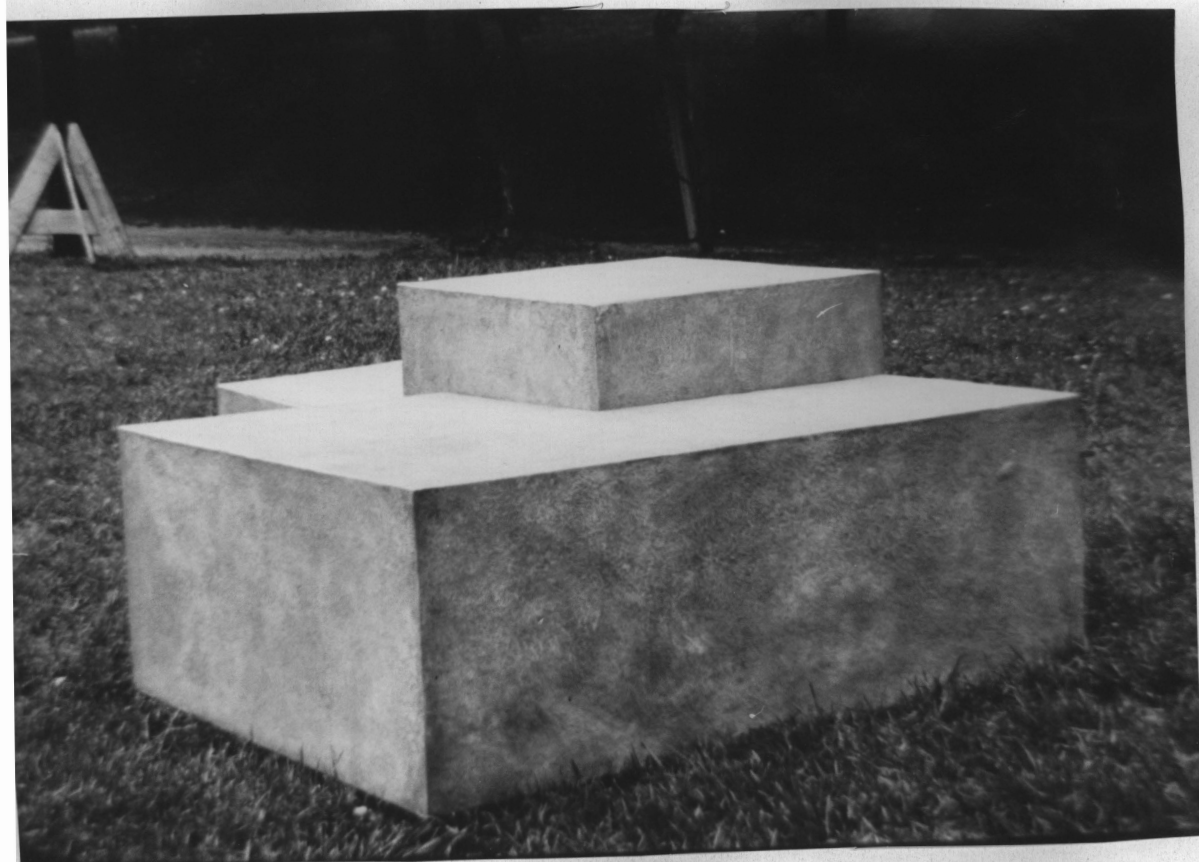
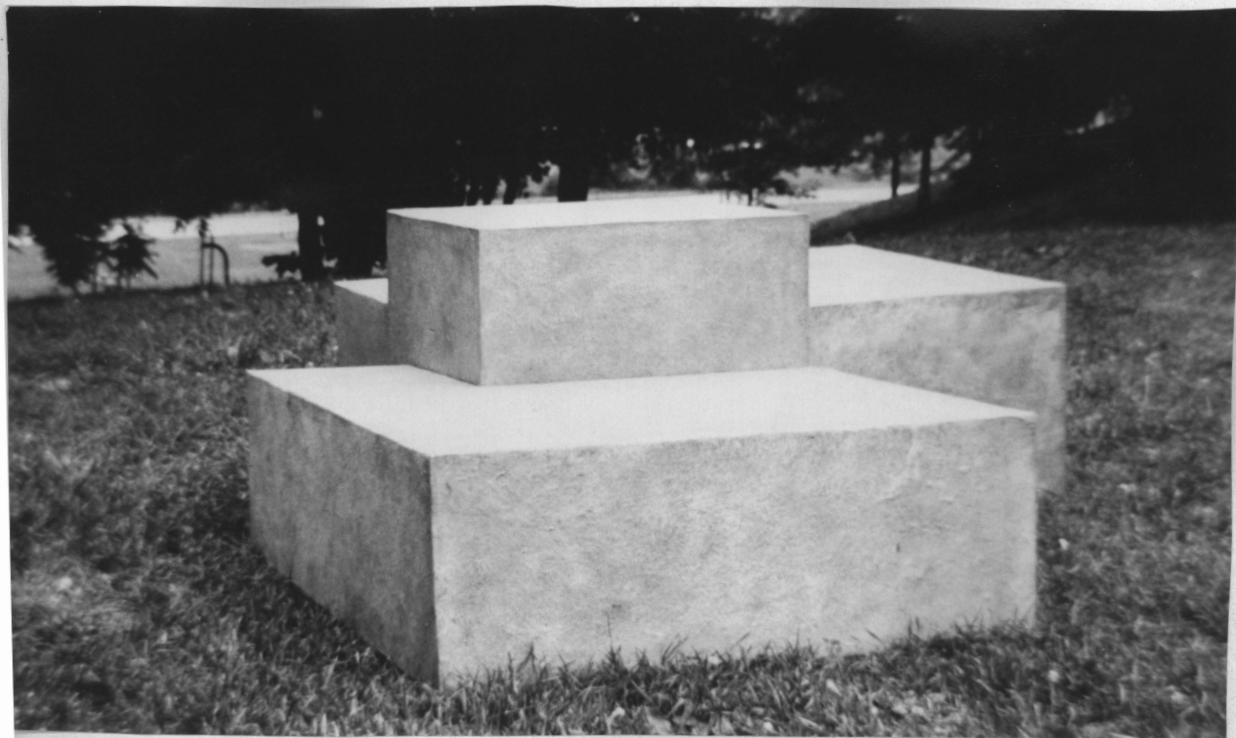


PLATE XXXVI



Another use of the simple geometric box creates interest by combining three boxes of the exact same scale but offers uniqueness by use of negative space and complimentary colors. Plates XXXVII, XXXVIII, XXXIX, XL, XLI, XLII, XLIII, and XLIV display two boxes of the dimensions 6' X 3' X 2' which are joined to a third box of the same dimensions. The third box was modified, to accept the two identical boxes, by removing two sections on the same side of equal area. In constructing this set of boxes, scale was toned down due to the more complex form. Plates XXXVII through XLIV demonstrate possible presentations of this set of boxes.

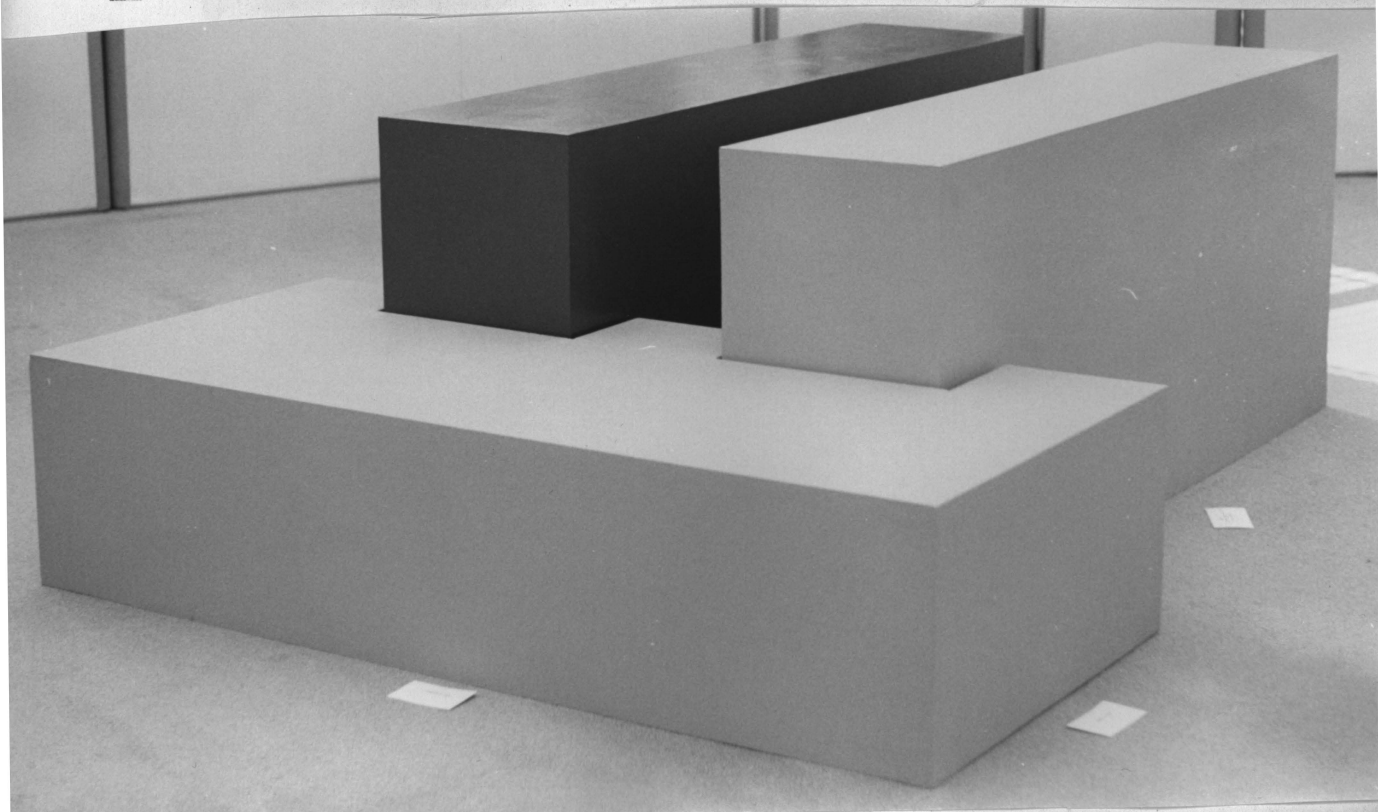


Plate XXXVII. Untitled. Particle board, enamel, paint, and latex. 3 boxes, each 6' X 2'6" X 17".

PLATE XXXVIII

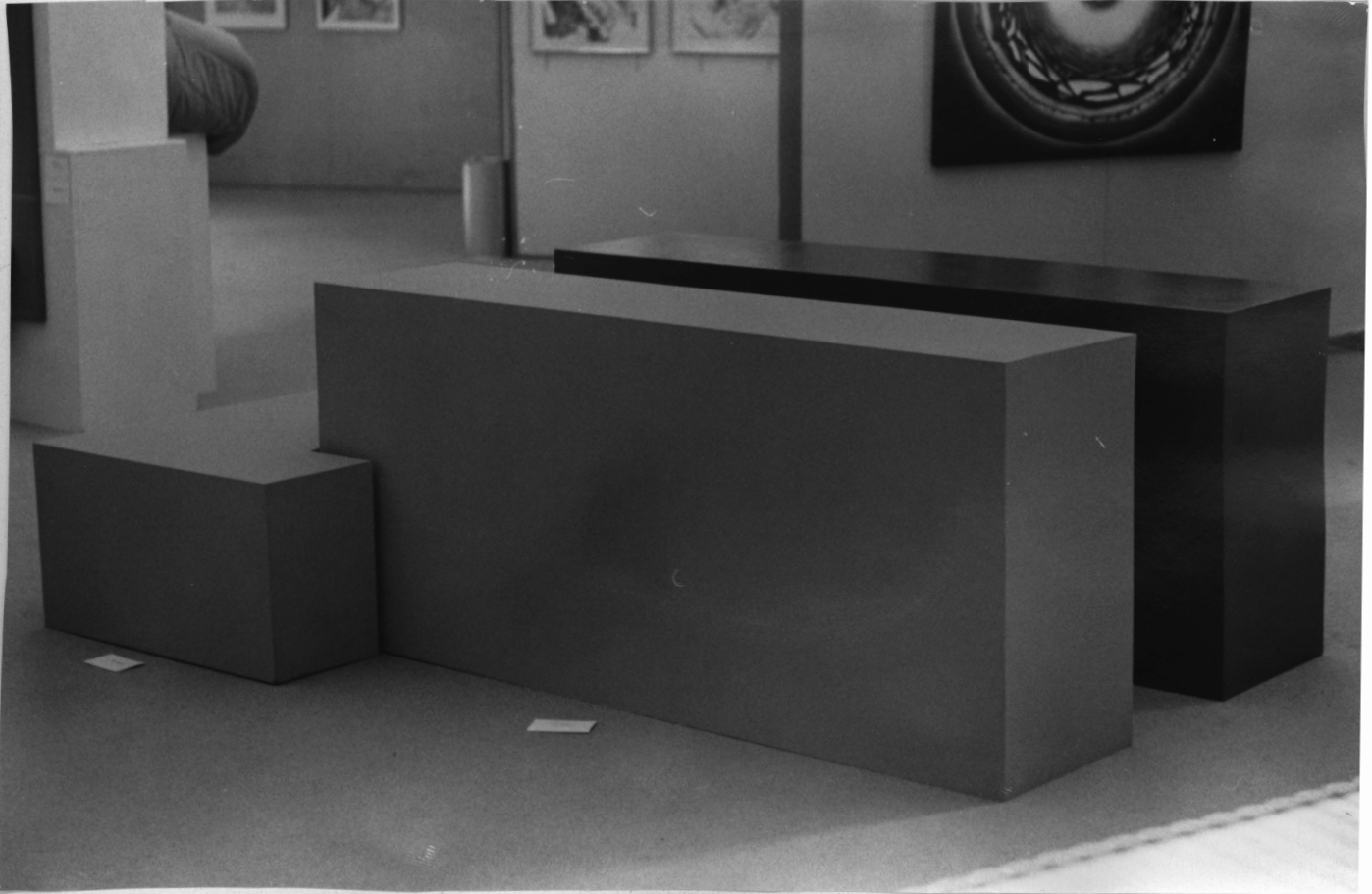


PLATE XXXIX

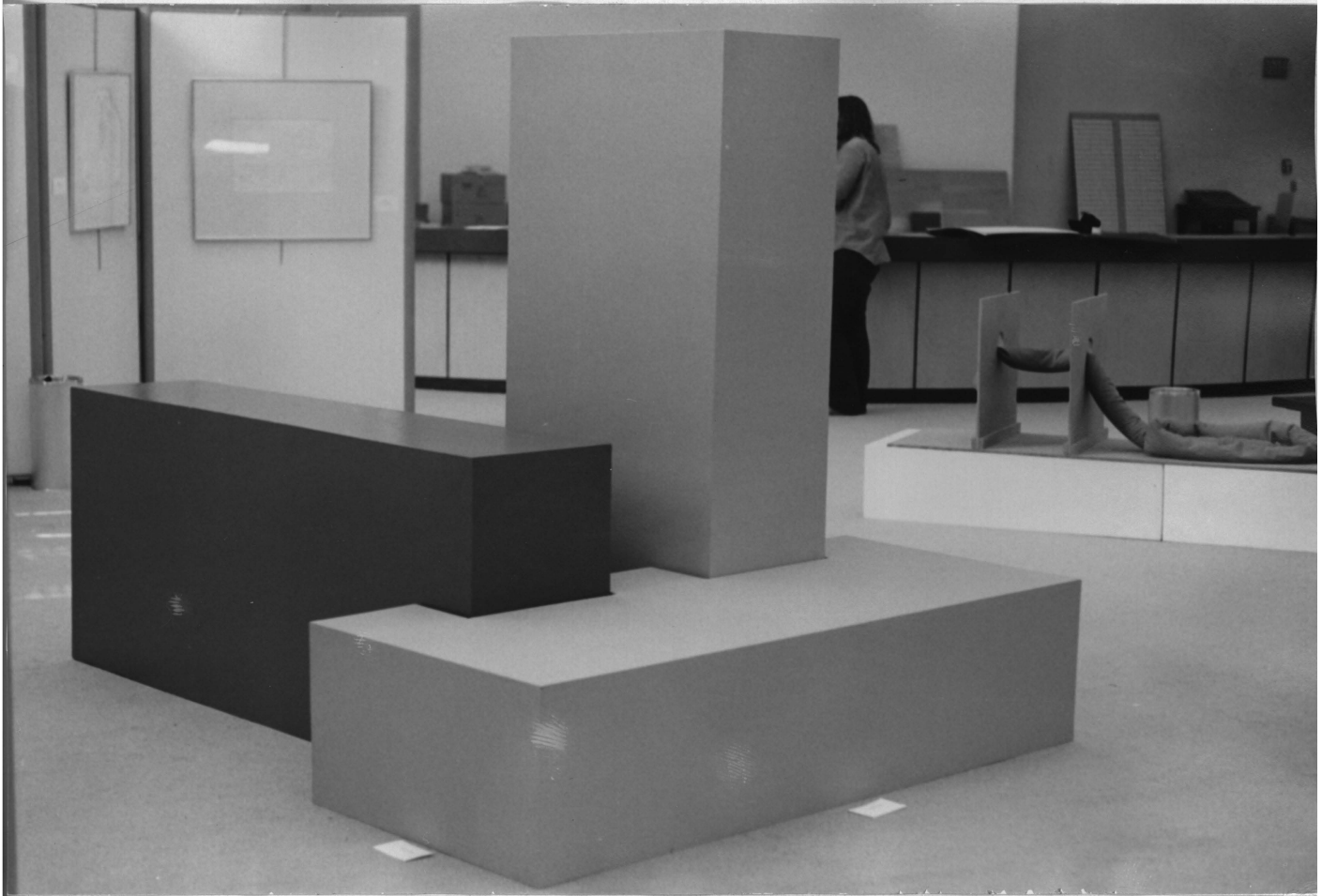




PLATE XL

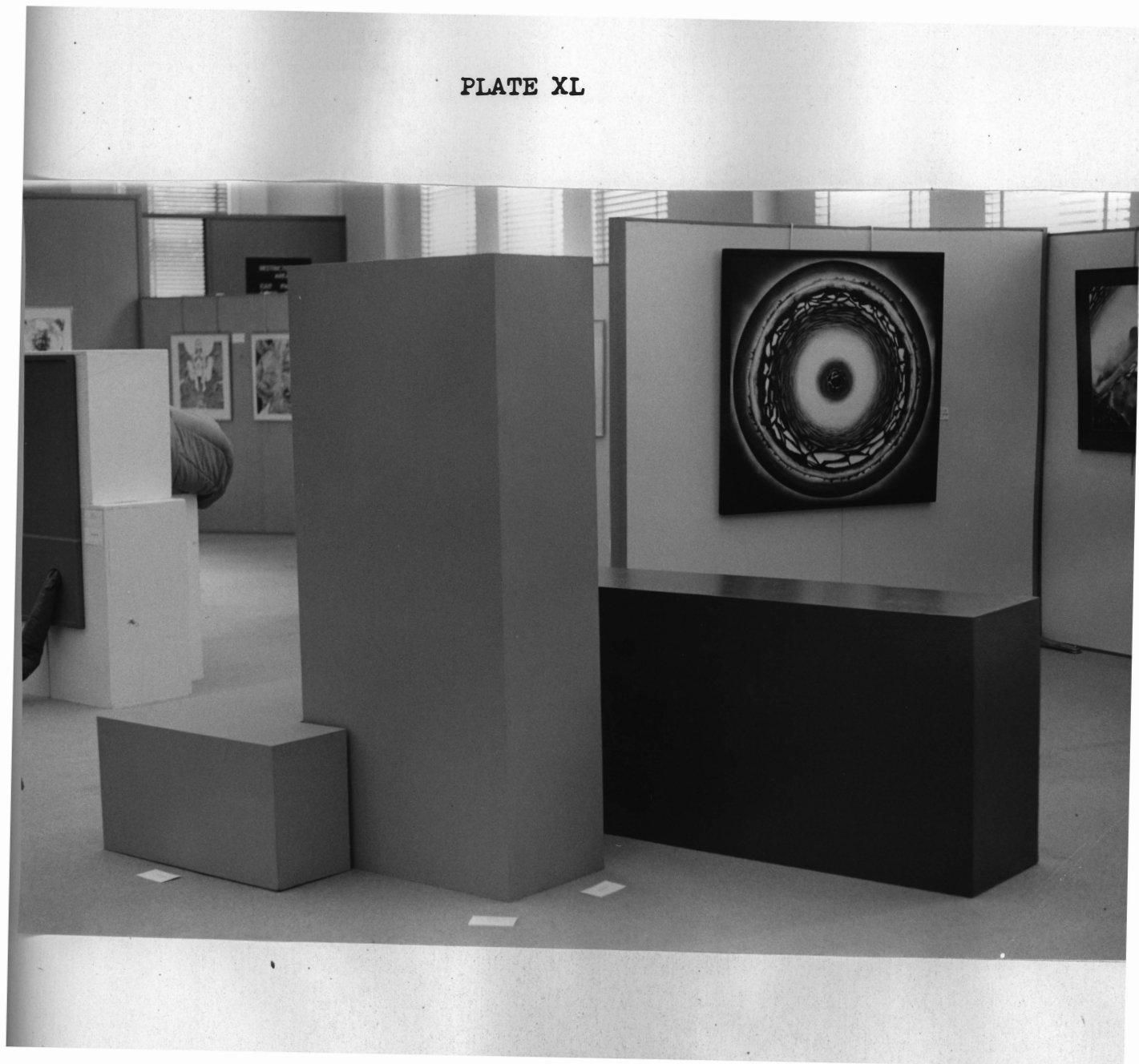


PLATE XLI



PLATE XLII

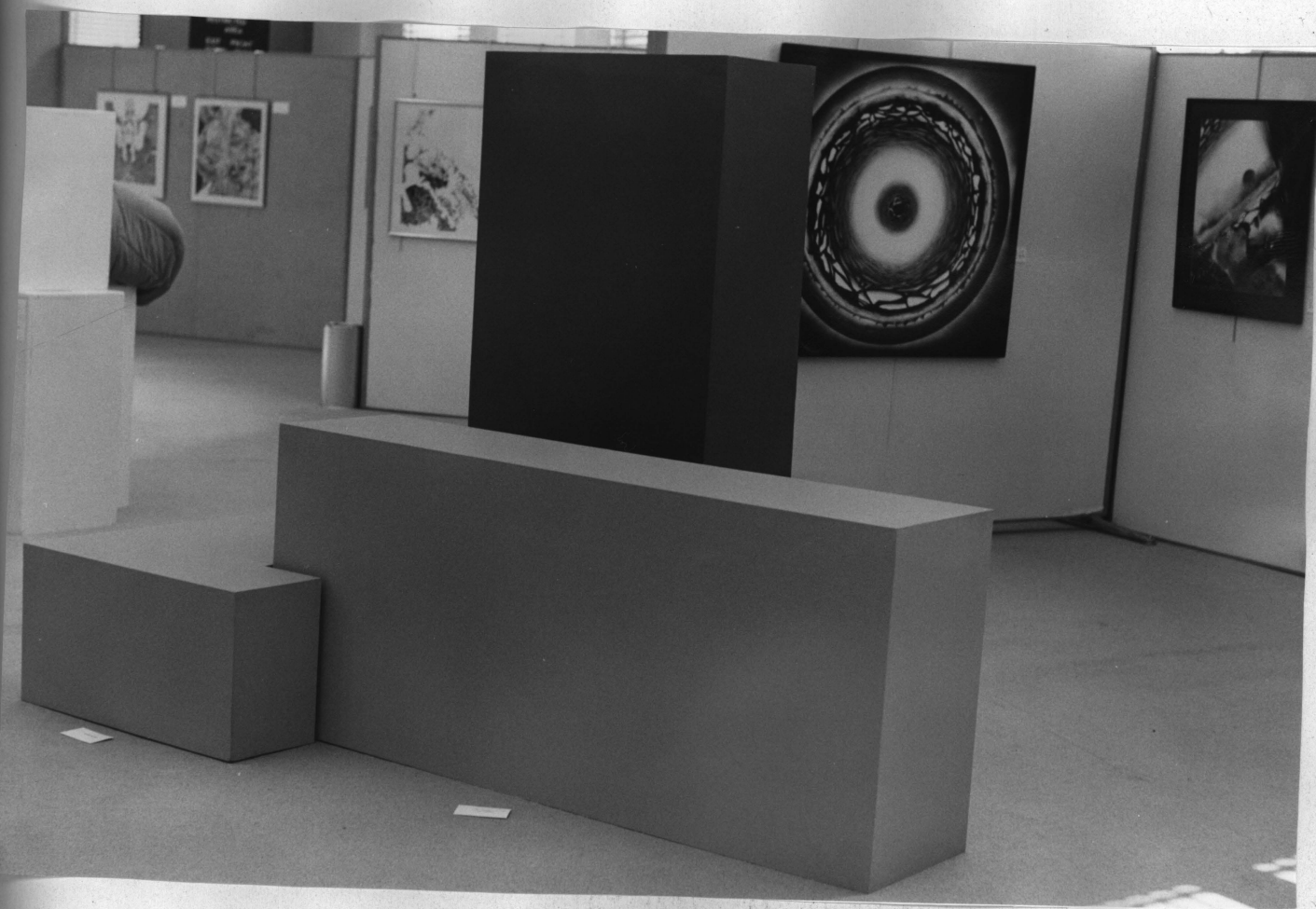


PLATE XLIII

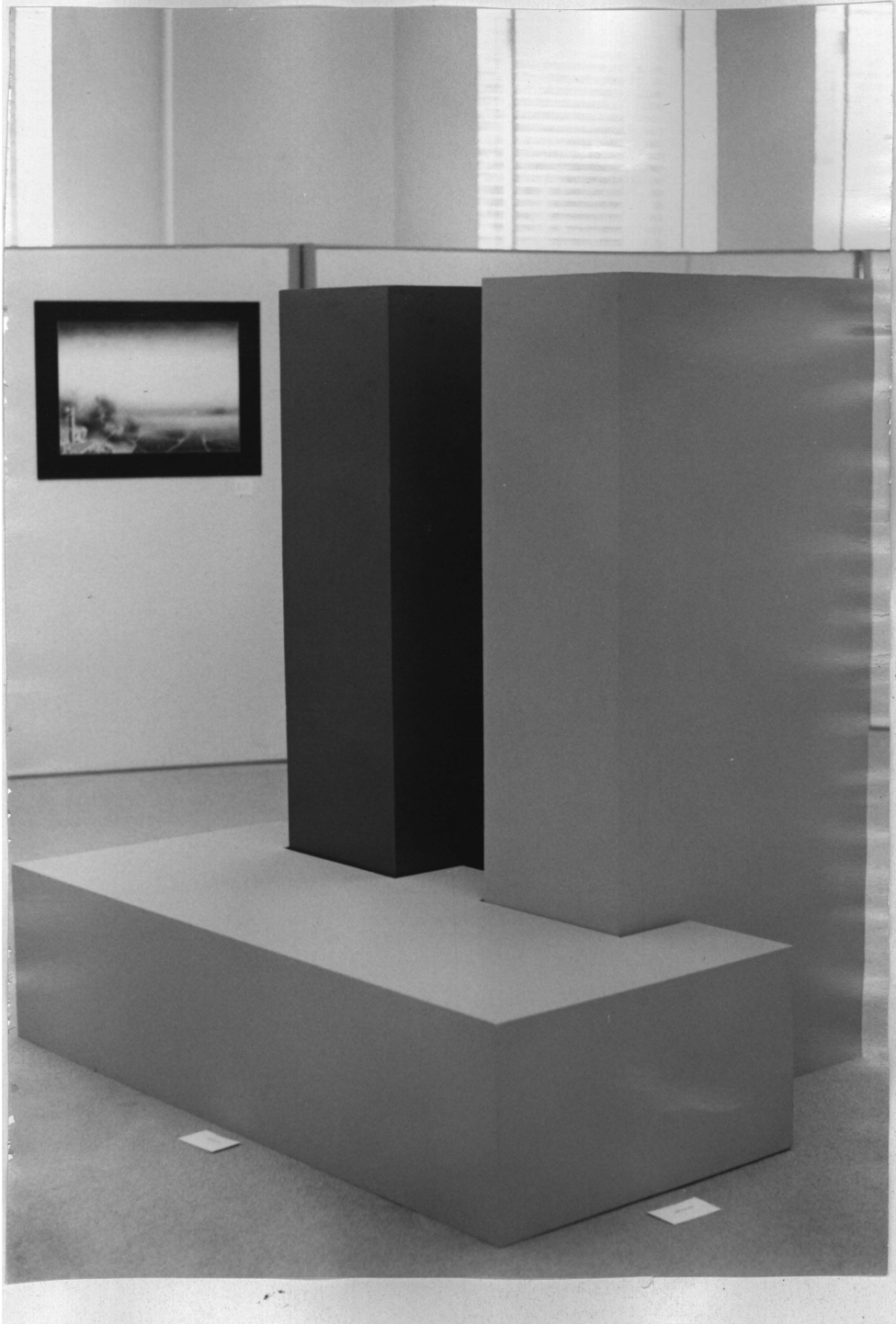
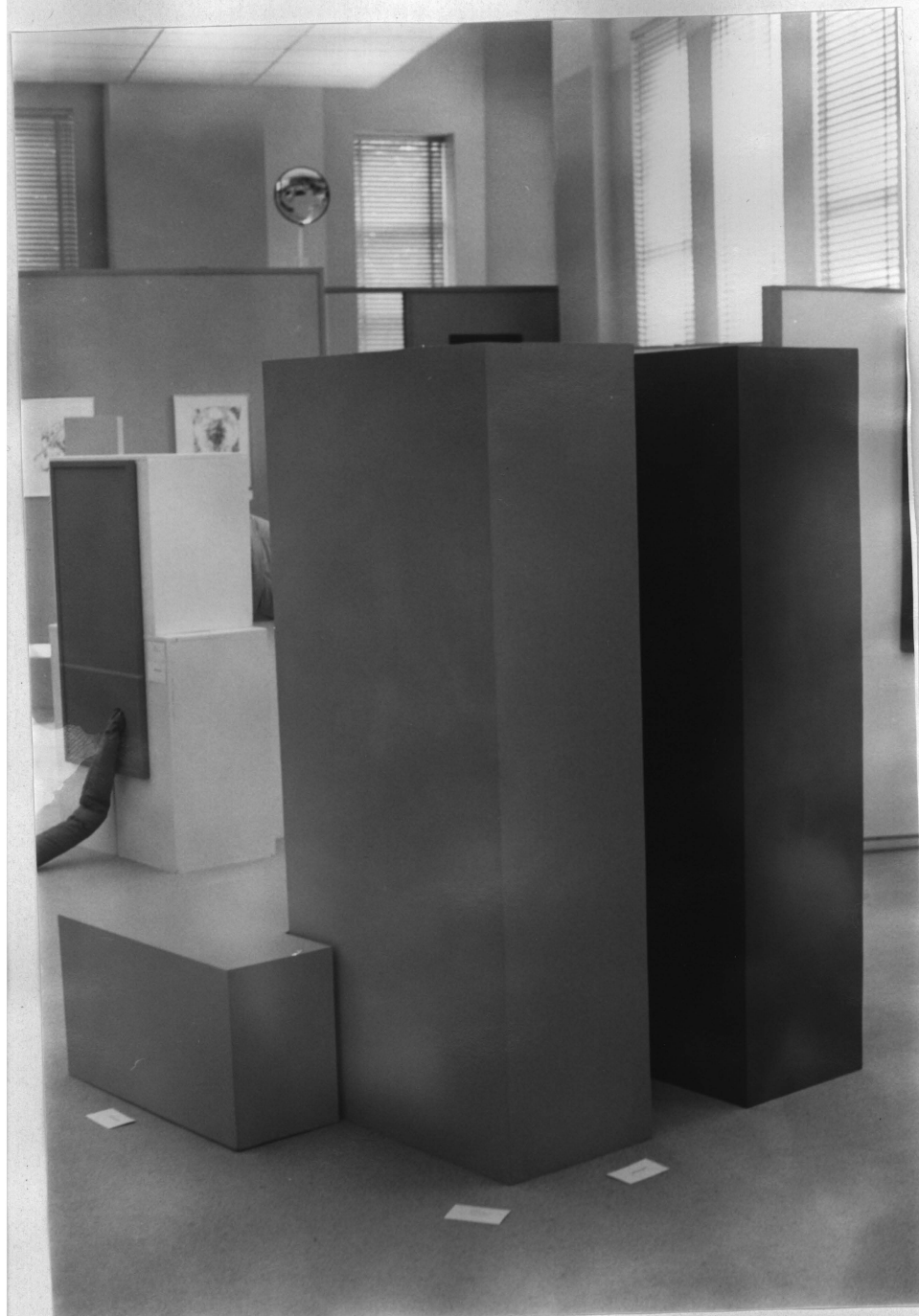


PLATE XLIV





The final two sets of boxes employed an angular insertion, detracting from the rigid 90° angles and straight parallel lines. The cut out angles have been made large enough to accomodate the corners of the unaltered box which completes each set. In Plates XLV, XLVI, XLVII, XLVIII, XLIX, and L, the angular cut out allows for as many possible interactions as does the straight square cut out of the set of boxes in Plates XX through XXVI. However Plates LI, LII, LIII, LIV, and LV allow for minimal insertions due to the interlocking space, thus is a less versatile set than any of the afore mentioned, although it still remains a valid interchangeable sculpture.

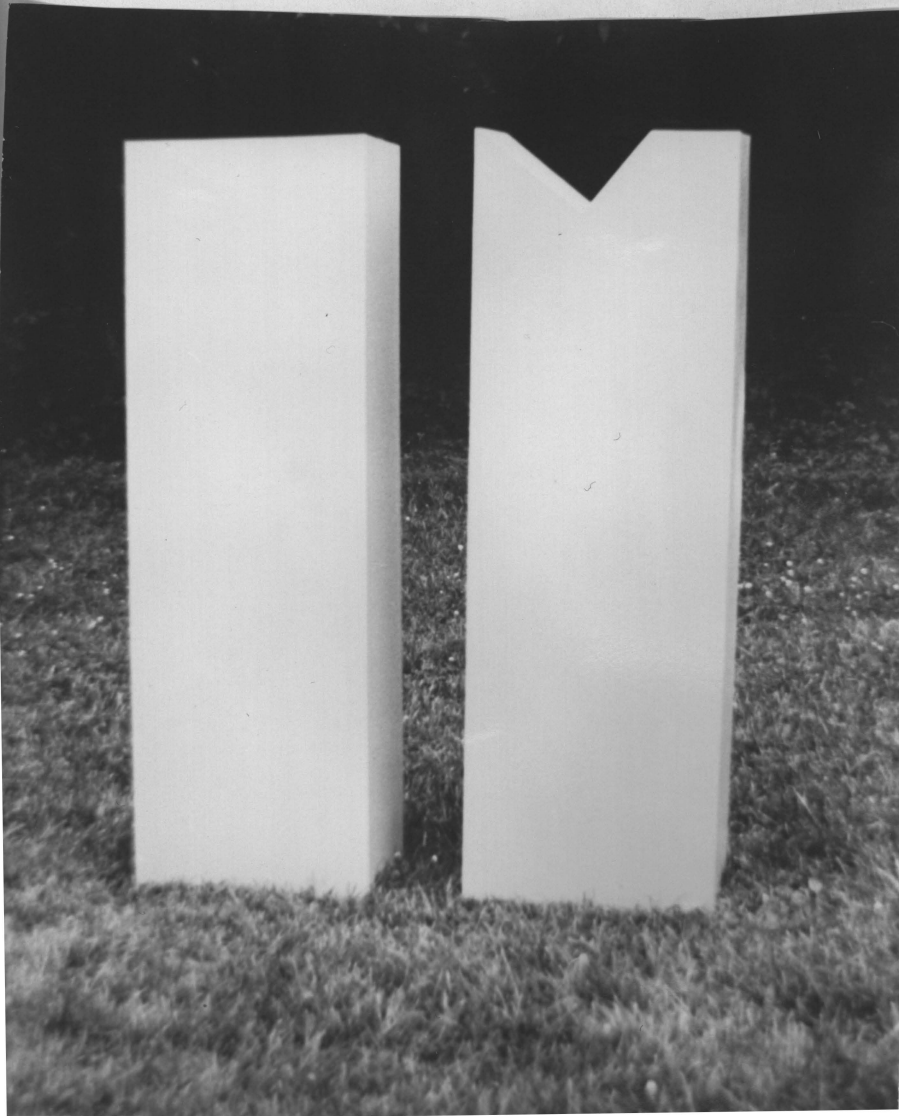


Plate XLV. Untitled.  
particle board and  
enamel paint. 6' X  
2' X 1'.

PLATE XLVI

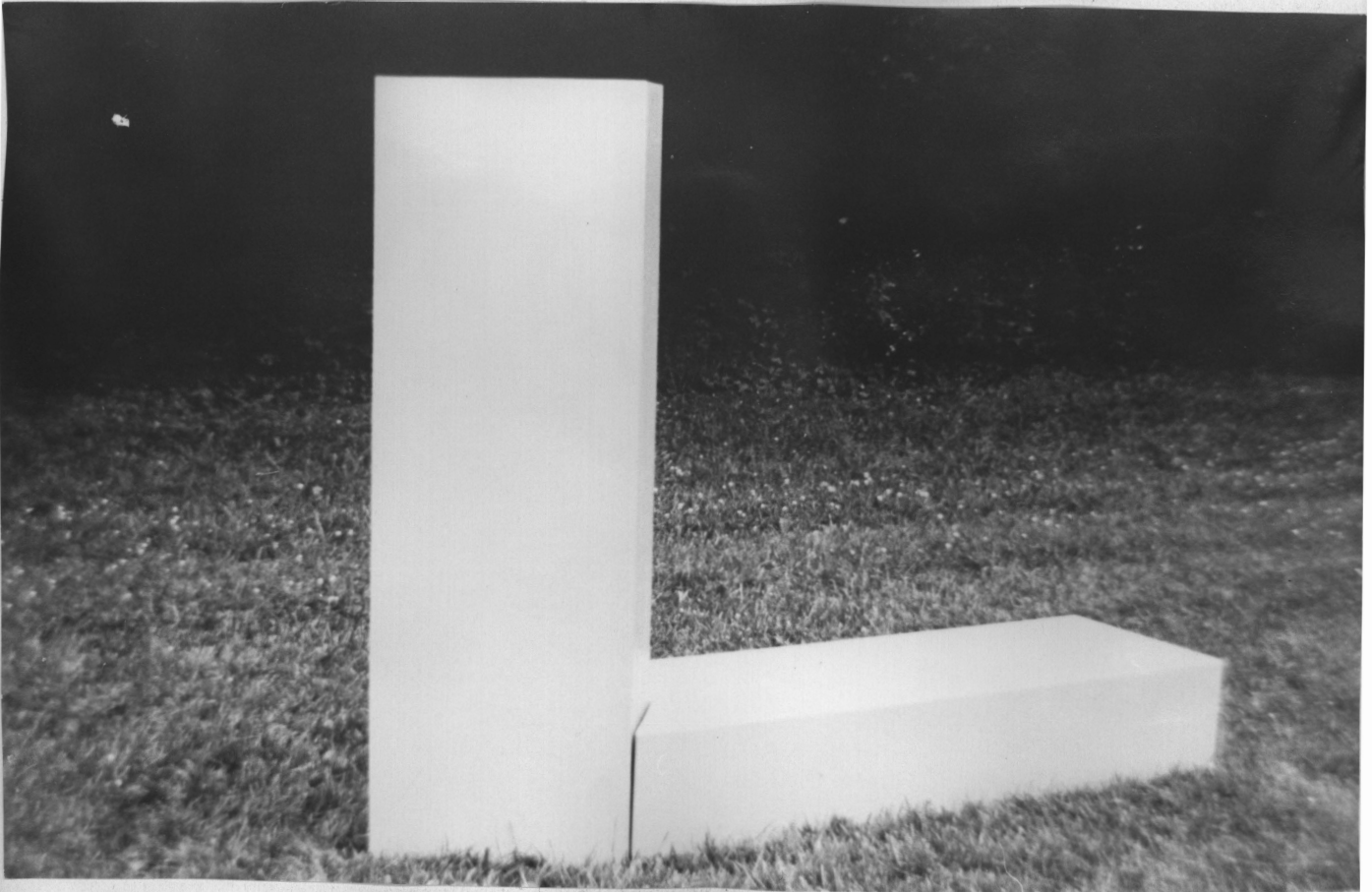


PLATE XLVII

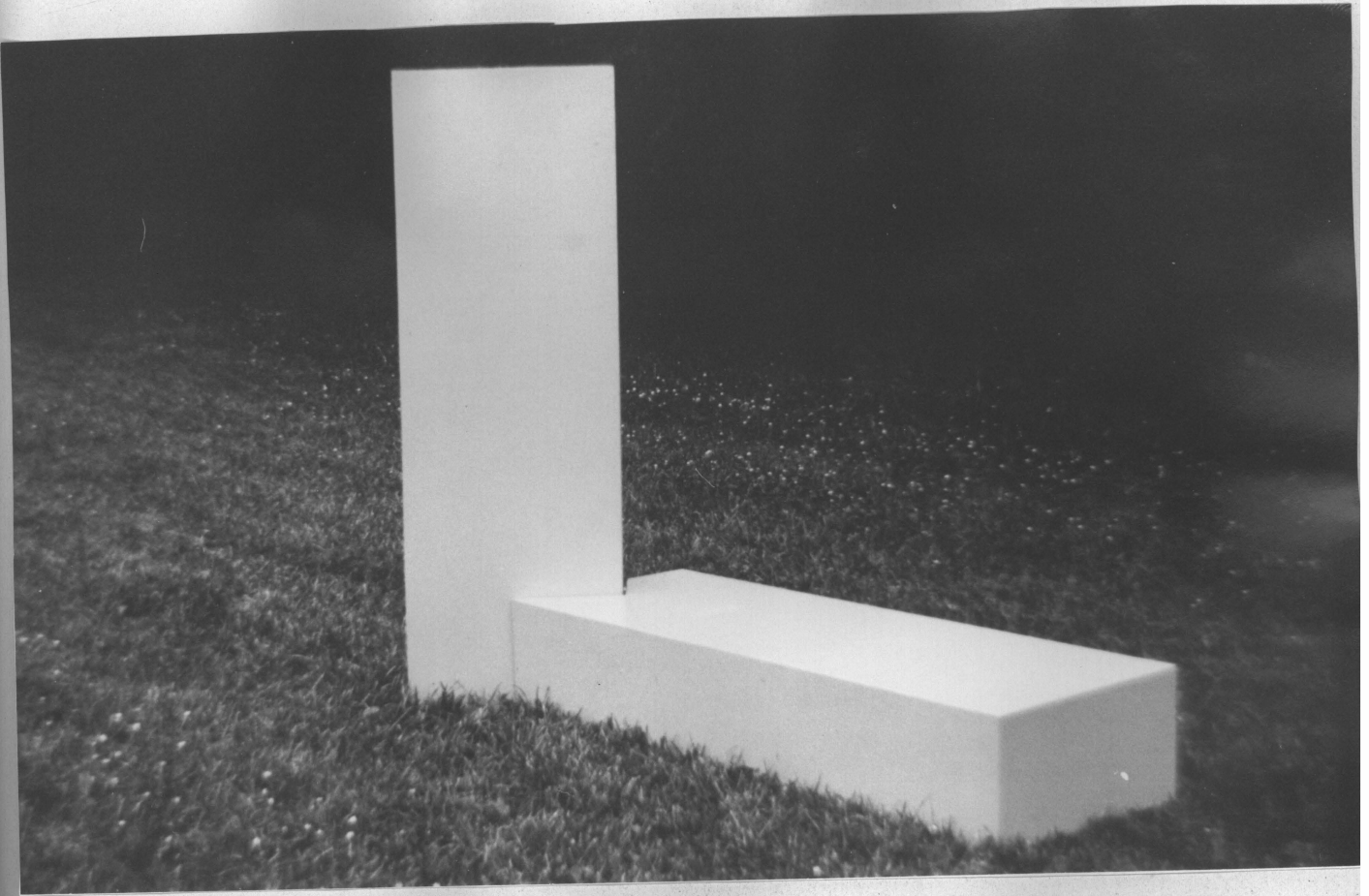


PLATE XLVIII



PLATE XLIX

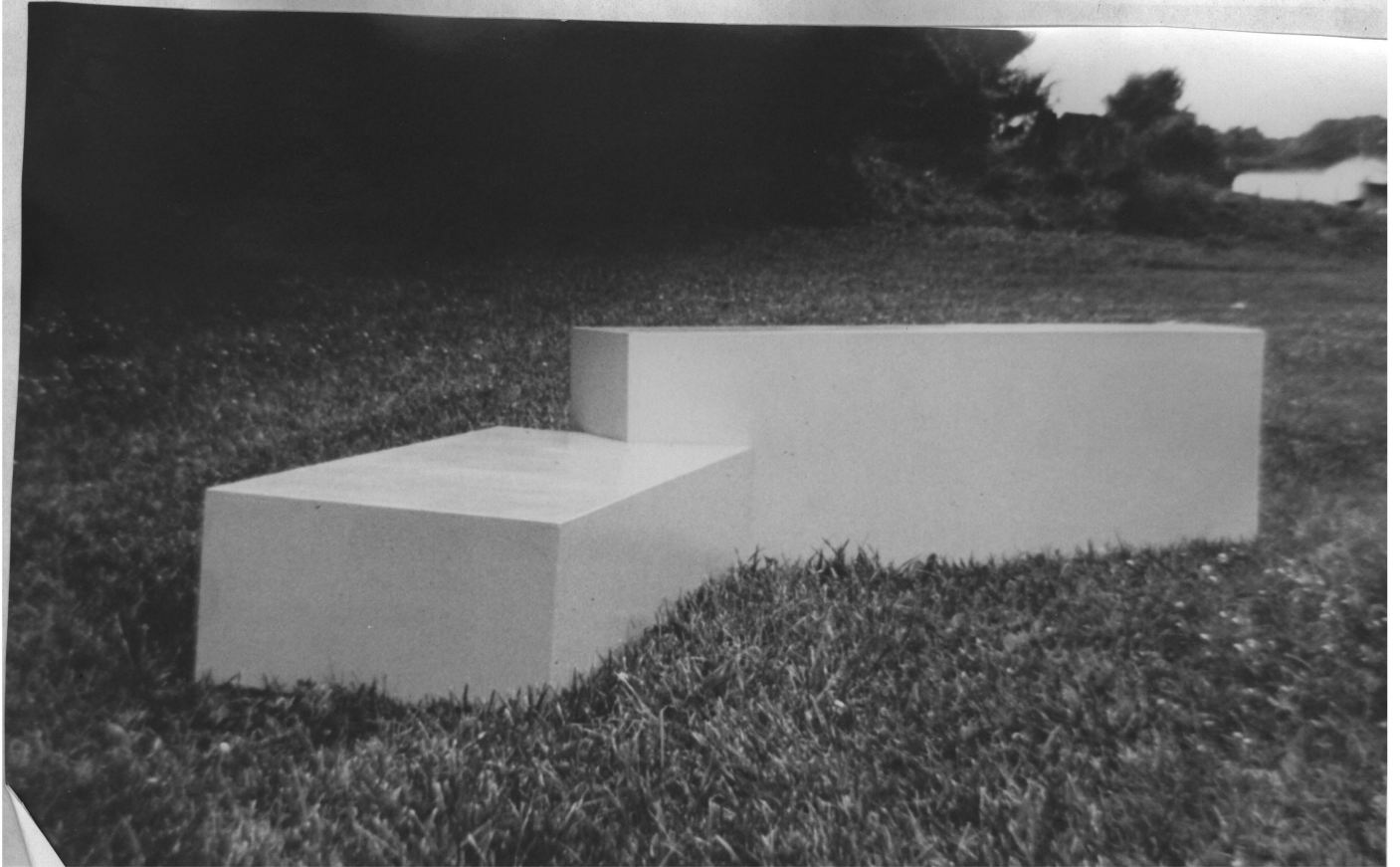




PLATE L

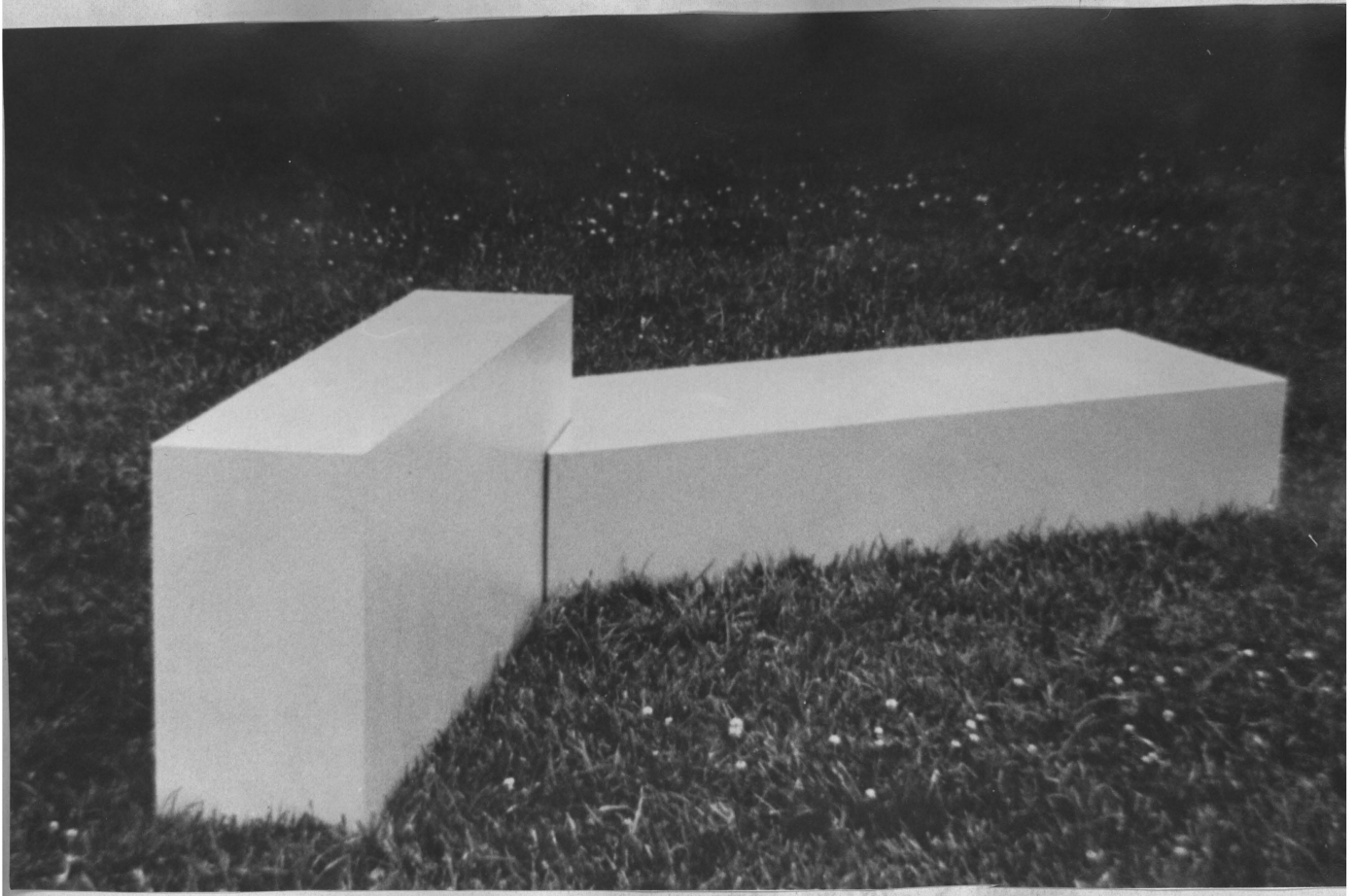
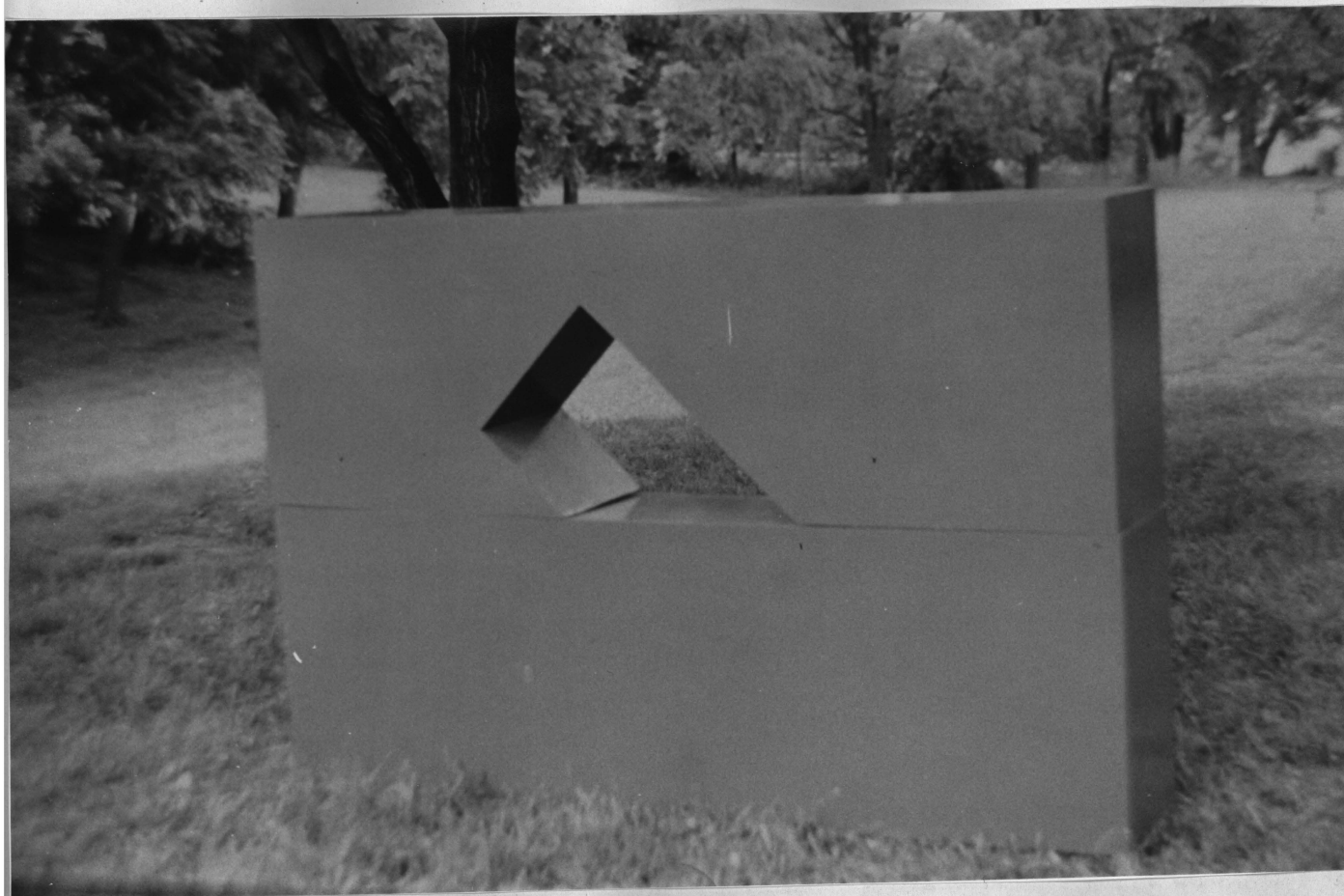


PLATE LI



Untitled. Particle board and enamel paint. 2 boxes, each  
6' X 2' X 13".

PLATE LII

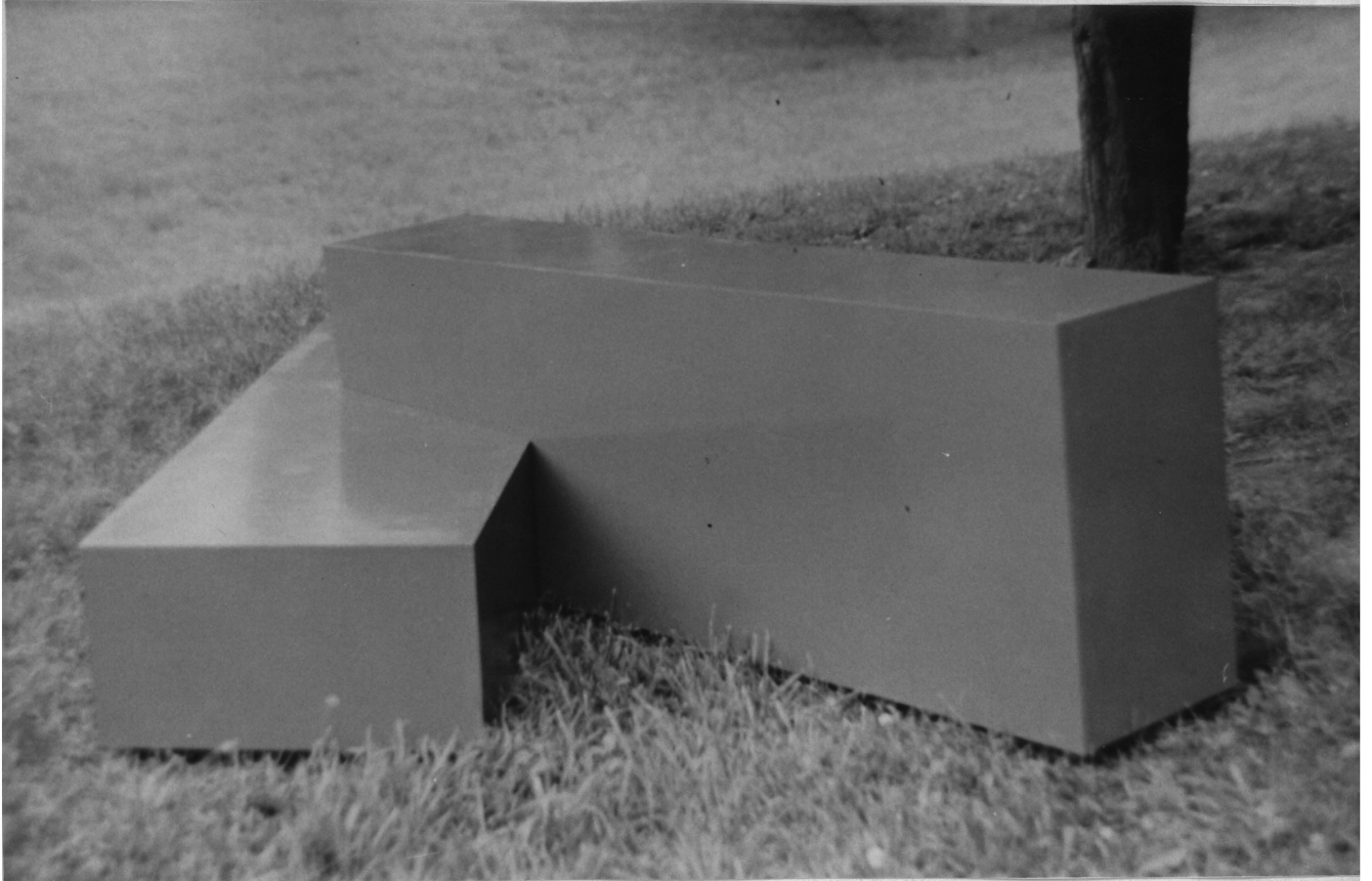


PLATE LIII

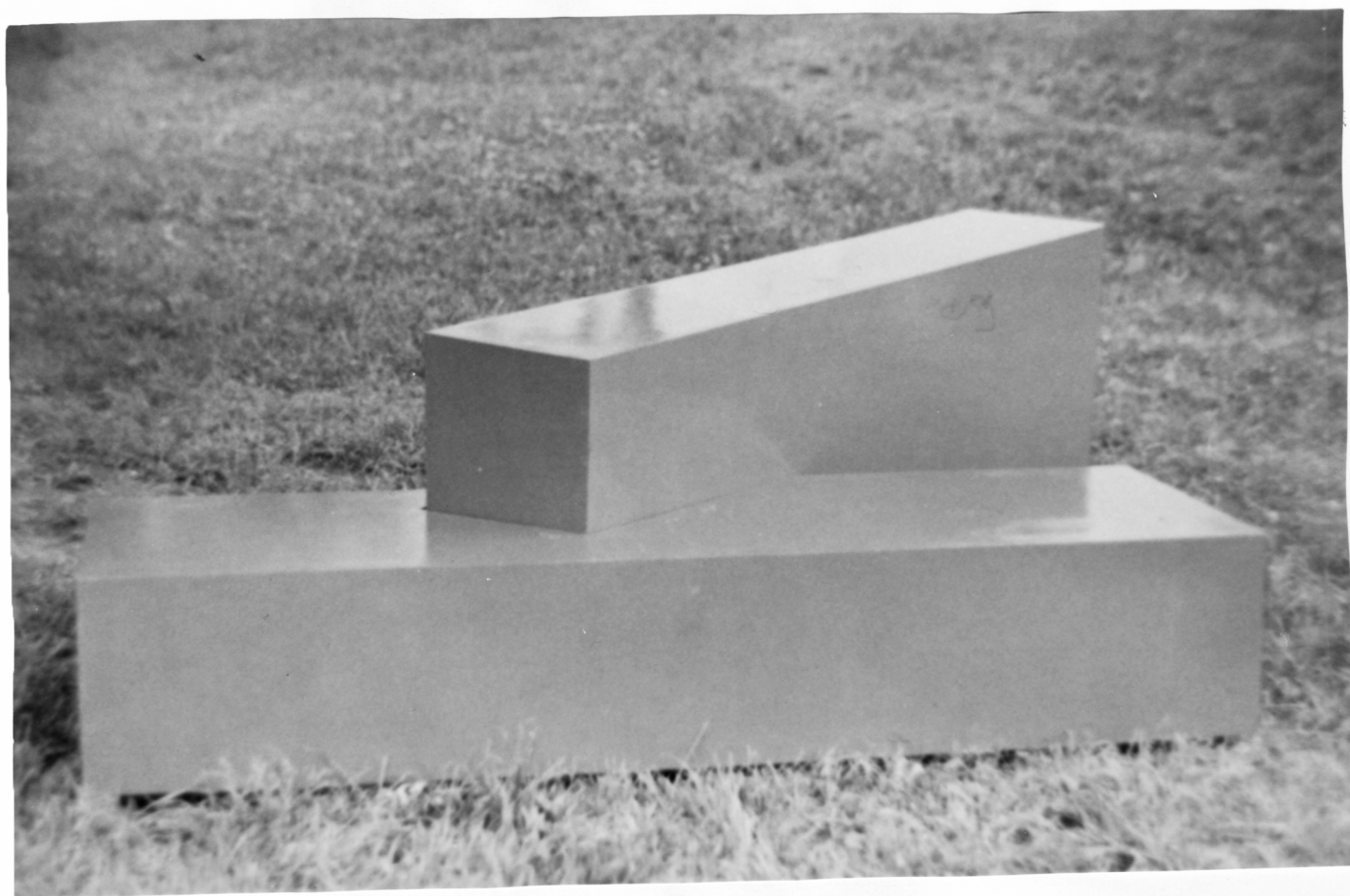


PLATE LIV

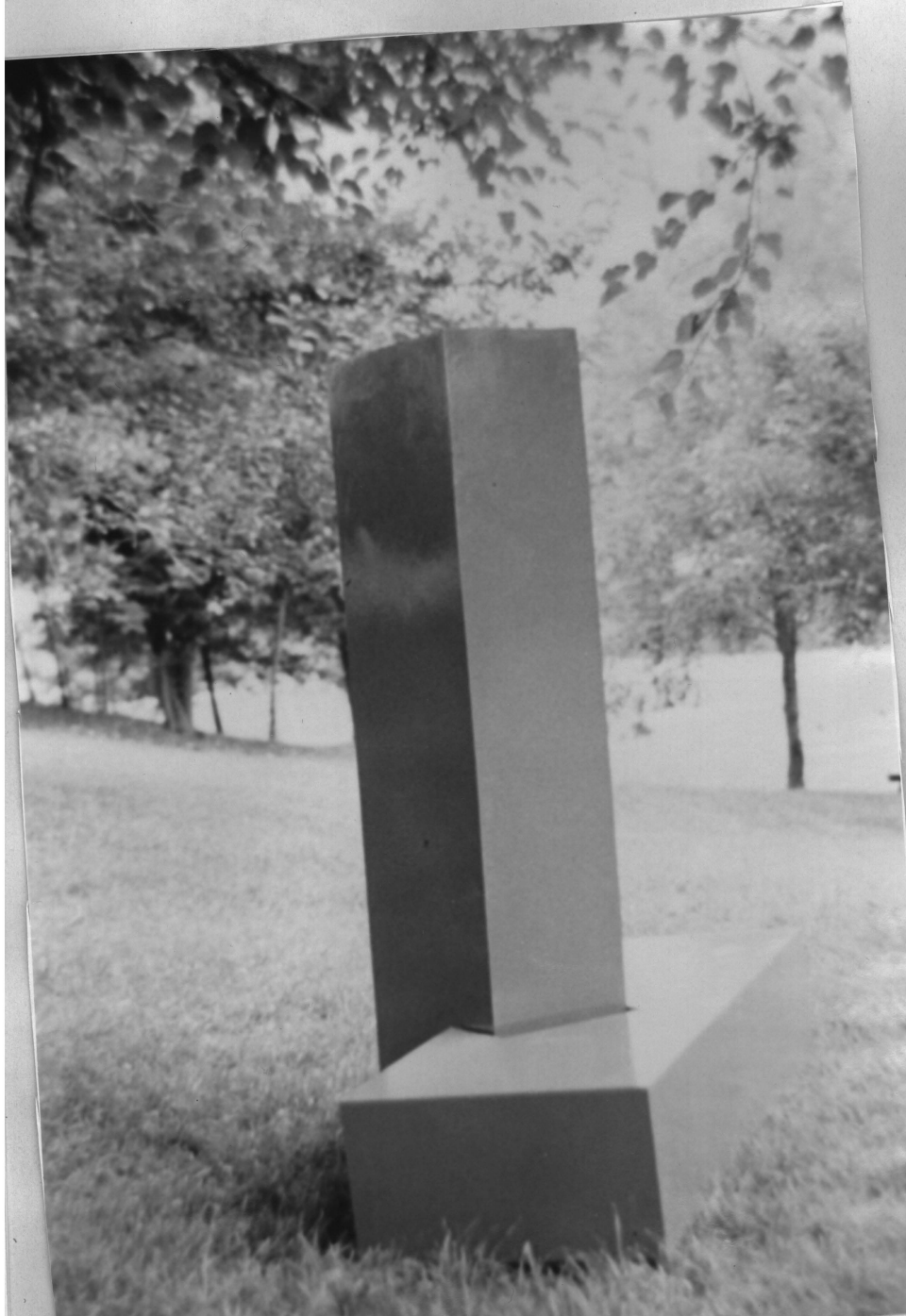
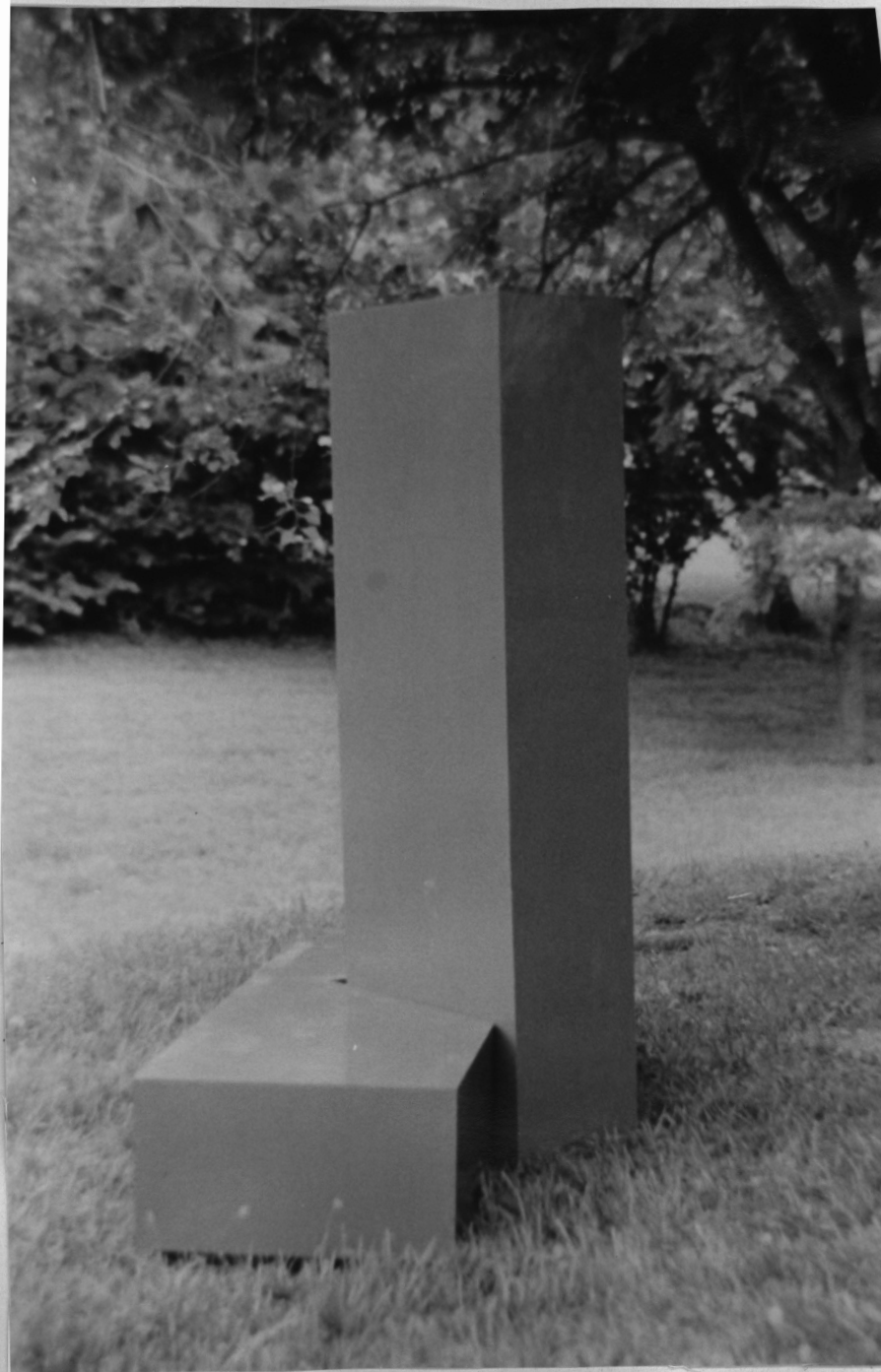




PLATE LV



It has thus far been demonstrated, that the simple geometric box has not yet been exhausted in terms of aesthetic possibilities. The concept of interchangeable sculpture is but one of many solutions to exploration of the box and it's potential. Interchangeable quality can be adapted to many other shapes, but seems naturally suited to the box in pure form.

# FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Maurice Tuchman (ed.), American Sculpture of the Sixties (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1967), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>R. Louw, "Judd and After", Studio, 184 (November, 1972), 171.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>4</sup>J. Jacobs, "Corcorin Gallery's School of Art National Playground Sculpture Competition," Art in America, 55 (November, 1967), 43.

<sup>5</sup>C. Robins, "The Artist Speaks," Art in America, 57 (September, 1969), 76.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

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